
The Potentially Disenchanted Consequences of the Rationalisation and Professionalisation of Sport

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Abstract – Sport is a positive social activity that has followed a pattern of progress towards the state in which we see it today. Today it plays a significant role in society on global scale and has the power to incite high levels of passion and emotion. Yet, the thrust of modern society has become calculation about how best to achieve the required outcome. Rational action has narrow aims and objectives that are geared towards providing a means to an end or obtaining value for money. This meant that human actions based on emotion needed to be replaced with rationally motivated actions to meet the demands of professionalism. This kind of modernisation in sport was part of the move from traditional and amateur to professional sport forms. This paper discusses the professionalisation and commercialisation of sport and their potentially disenchanting consequences.

Keywords – Commercialisation, Disenchanting Globalisation, Professionalisation, Society, Sport.

I. INTRODUCTION

Professionalism in sport meant the introduction of specialist coaches, trainers, planning, organising, image representation and a significant shift from self-discipline to managerial discipline. Turning games into sport and then into professional sport to meet the demands of globalisation meant introducing additional resources (Guttmann, 2004). For example, managers, media controllers and decision-makers who were to orchestrate proceedings. Globalisation introduced a single world culture that was centred on consumerism, mass media, Americana and the English language (Scholte, 2005). Globalisation has made sport truly accessible the world over (Miller, et al. 2001). Sport has become increasingly commercialised, sophisticated, controlled and managed. At the present time many modern day sports are high profile across the globe because of the media who have significant influence on their image and development (Nauright and Zipp, 2018). For example, football is now at the heart of mass media production on an extraordinary scale. Being the national sport of many countries means that football receives more media coverage than many any other sports. For example, extensive coverage is especially evident during international football competition. The game is reported daily in the national and local newspaper, it is available on the internet, it is televised on television at home, in the pubs, via radio broadcasts and merchandise (e.g., flags, football kits, stickers and mugs) becomes available. Yet these processes are often responsible for the creation of an exaggerated sense of belonging, national identity and national pride (Anderson, 2006). Having a distorted sense of national pride is perhaps linked to hooliganism in football (Dunning, 2000). Commercialisation processes require professional sports to entertain the masses and for the commentators of these sports to adopt the style of professional entertainers (Gruneau, 1999). Guttmann (2004) notes that originally sports were intended as alternatives to work but the modernisation of sports like football has seen them become reflections of it.

Lasch (2018) says, “The master propagandist, like the advertising expert, avoids obvious emotional appeals and strives for a tone that is consistent with the prosaic quality of modern life - a dry, bland matter of factness.”

II. MODERNISING SPORT

Early forms of sport (games) were known for their lack of having sharply defined roles. Games like this were characterised by their unspecialised and undifferentiated unique nature (Horne et al. 1999). Sailors, diplomats and British traders on foreign travels often introduced and spread new games and pastimes around the world. It was the gentry and civilised aristocrats who developed the idea of less violent, more civilised ways of enjoying their leisure time. The calming down of violence gradually manifested itself as the development of sport (Elias and Dunning, 1986). The latter part of the 19th century was characterised by the “sportisation” of sport. Elias and Dunning, (1986) note that the “sportisation” process occurred in two waves. The first wave happened in the 18th century where the prominent pastimes of boxing, horse racing and cricket surfaced as modern sports. The second wave occurred during the 19th century where tennis, athletics, soccer and rugby became modern (Elias and Dunning, 1986). The literature suggests that public schools were largely responsible for transformation of games into sports during the 19th century where they provided sporting activities to build moral character, leadership and teamwork skills. Public schools harnessed the amateur spirit of athleticism through their physical education sessions. These sessions helped to nurture moral values, determination, obedience, commitment, collaboration, fair play and the ability to provide leadership (Mangan, 1981). Through physical activity, individuals developed a set of socially acceptable moral values. The public schools created clearly defined sets of principles and established identifiable standards (Hargreaves, 1986). By the second half of the 19th century two predominant themes were emerging; team games increased competitiveness which was considered vital and sport developed moral behaviour that was recognised the world over. Public schools held the view that sport was to be highly valued because of its ability to bring people together. For example, on a societal level, it broke down barriers between national borders and started to represent nationhood and national pride.

The competitive element of sport taught how to interpret winning and losing (Mangan, 1981). The public schools were firmly establishing the value of playing by the rules and accepting outcomes in an appropriate manner. Involvement in sport gave personal satisfaction by improving health, appearance and generated friendships. The schools felt that sports like cricket, netball and hockey helped build strength of character (Mangan, 1981). Educational establishments felt confident that instilling these values would prevent their pupils from participating in unethical behaviour. They wanted their pupils to uphold obedient conduct and possess fearless courage (Mangan, 1981). They believed that sport in schools developed important social values and encouraged pupils to be ambitious in life. Many of the core principles of amateurism are demonstrated in the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*. James (1994 p, 25) comments “we learned to play cricket as a team, by subordinating personal inclinations and interests, to the good of the whole. We kept a stiff upper lip and didn’t complain about ill fortune. We were generous to our opponents and congratulated them on victories, even when we knew they didn’t deserve it.”

Hargreaves (1986 p, 38) says that the athlete ideology of the public schools had long lasting effects on the character of sport in Britain. Hargreaves explains that modern sports were the cultural products of industrial society. He notes that social friction and increased interaction during the industrial era contributed to the creation of modern sports. 1870 through to the mid 1920’s saw dramatic shifts towards the globalisation of sport (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007). It saw significant changes in the structure of national societies and identities. These changes stimulated an increase in international relations. This increase saw a growth in established global

awards, communication networks and systems (Horne, et al. 1999). International sports tournaments were governed by standardised and rationalised practises and became diffused amongst all parts of Europe, South America, Africa and Asia (e.g., the first cricket test match in 1877, the formation of the International Olympic Committee in 1894 or the formation of the International Amateur Athletic Association in 1912). The Olympic Games pioneered major transitions that took place in the process of sports evolution (Espy, 2018). The modernisation of sport saw the requirement of records and results in the form of tables, games played, statistical data and quantification of games played (Guttmann, 2004). Sport became the new expression of nationalism, which increased the pressure for international sports competition. During the 1920's and 1930's management systems for this development became considerably Americanised (Horne, et al. 1999). This particular change reduced many of the previous contrasts between sporting cultures.

The development of television technology and the jet during the 1950's and 1960's provided the vital link between all of the above components. Gruneau (1999) notes that this period saw the brakes come off commercialism. He says that televised sports also proliferated the sports, shoe clothing and equipment industries in a way that no other medium had done before. Corporations like Nike, Reebok and Slazenger pioneered the moves by connecting themselves around the globe with sub-contractors, sports organisations and media networks (Gruneau, 1999). To survive this climate of change sports had to become profitable business ventures. Large sports organisations took advantage of the changing economic arrangements by having their merchandise manufactured, distributed, designed and sold all over the world (Horne, et al. 1999). Much of this kind of transformation came from opportunists, mavericks and entrepreneurs who established themselves as sports agents.

Dassler of Adidas and Rupert Murdoch of News Corporation are notable examples that instigated progress of this kind. The growing trend towards entrepreneurship weakened the traditional amateur spirit of sport. The merging of BSkyB and Sky television along with the launch of pay-per-view television (televising major sporting events) was responsible for the complete reformation of football in England. Bero Rigauer (cited in Horne, et al. 1999) notes that modern sports are characterised by their association with large corporations. He suggests that large organisations have penetrated and taken over sport and comments that sport-governing bodies were instrumental in developing commercialism in sport. Horne, et al. (1999) suggest that the organisations sponsor sport because: a) enhances their image (associating with elite level sports stars), b) increases the awareness of the company and their products (televised coverage of your product), c) provides opportunities for hospitality and entertainment (sports betting encourages sports spectatorship), d) generates large amounts of money. According to Rigauer, (cited in Horne, et al. 1999 p. 236) modern sport is shaped by its organisational arrangements, mechanisation, rationalisation and bureaucratisation in the same way that modern work is organised.

III. STRETCHING SPORT BEYOND ITS NATURAL MEANS WITH MONEY, GLITZ AND GLAMOUR

Mass conformity towards the idea of globalisation has forced a change in the way societies think and behave (Nauright and Zipp, 2018). Ritzer (2000, p. 132) says that the power and concept of rationalisation in the Western world has created a large number of disenchanting societies. He explains that the natural world is being stripped of its natural properties. He says that, bourgeoisie created systems unfortunately have little or no regard for individual feelings, emotions and concerns. This kind of viewpoint is echoed by the Leftist theorists in the sports domain. They are fully aware and accept that the globalisation of professional sport is part of the evolutionary

process. They object though to the overbearing control that is required to produce the kind of results professional sport demands (Morgan, 1994). Examples include: extensive bureaucracy, increased regulations, rigid institutional demands, a need to win at all costs, a need to produce money on a sickly scale, consistent high entertainment value, an exaggerated sense of spectacle and a need to create national identity through sport (Morgan, 1997). The leftist theorists argue that the carefully monitored standardising measures currently directing modern sports are stifling performances, encouraging cheating and increasing corruption (Morgan, 2007). Leftist theorists are concerned that continual degradation of this kind will banish the concept of pure play spirit in sport altogether.

Lasch (2018) suggests that the West is driven by contemporary hedonism that begins as the pursuit of pleasure and is disguised as being the struggle for power. Marxist writer, Gruneau (1999) argues that social and leftist theorists concentrate on the urgent and persistent questions of social development. Cultural interpretation and empirical analysis assess the effect that changing social circumstances have on people (Smith, 2000). In this context, we can analyse sport from a leftist theorist's point of view. Morgan (1994) says that sport institutions have the capacity to manoeuvre subordinates into compliant forms of behaviour to legitimate their authority. We can see this process occurring with the formation of national identity through sport (Morgan, 1997). For example, National football teams each adopt distinctive stereotypical patterns of behaviour that separates them from one another (Seippel, 2017). The people orchestrating this justify it by saying that such self-interested behaviour is beyond moral reproach. Elias (2000) explains that social customs and conduct are formed to cement distinguishable characteristics that help identify social inferiors. He suggests that those who break these rules are deemed uncivilised and inferior. He argues that the customs serve as a mark of distinction and preserve their threatened position. He adds that this behaviour; retains exclusivity, builds social barriers and is strictly regulated. Morgan (1994) explains that the purpose of social dealings is to persuade people to accept set beliefs and values. He suggests that the odour of corruption and distortion in sport stems from the dysfunctional relationship between institutions and society. Lasch (cited in Morgan, 1994 p.143) suggests that sport has become the object of mass consumption. He argues that the capitalist system is arranged, so that obtaining meaning from it is derived through the buying and selling of commodities. (The buying and selling of football players is an example that represents this ideology). Hegonomist theorist Antonio Gramsci explains that hegemony refers to a set of values, principals, beliefs and ideas that support the status quo to such an extent that they appear as common sense to those within society (Cashmore, 2000). For example, the bourgeois intentionally create a culture in the country that is accepted by all to exert their power over and within society.

In this context, it can be argued that football has become a tool used by the bourgeoisie to control the masses. For example, today footballers must behave in a supportive way towards the status quo by providing a source of entertainment, excitement and pleasure that reflects the working ethics of the working class (Guttmann, 2004). Such ethics can include; the value of obeying authority, equal opportunities, hard work, fair play, determination and team work. Gruneau (1999) notes that with modern day sport surplus entertainment dominates proceedings excessively (e.g., pre-match entertainment, advanced technology, glamour, advertisements, excitement, gloss, image and value for money). He interprets this influx of activity above all else as saturating and stifling. He says if anything, it merely deflects interest from the sport itself. Herbert Marcuse, a Marxist philosopher suggests that oppressive sporting climates have turned performances on the sports field one-dimensional (Cashmore, 2000). Perhaps inferring that professional sport no longer contains the intrinsic qualities that made them attractive to play and watch in the first place (e.g., basic competitiveness, enjoyment and characteristics of playfulness) considering

them to be unnecessary and weak. Using a Marxist interpretation, it can be argued that professional sports men and women are controlled by the bourgeoisie by factors beyond their control to carry out a required sports ritual that results in sports performances that are stifled, overly controlled, overly regulated and lacking in initiative, creativity and originality.

Ritzer (2000) says that the necessary humanistic qualities that are driven by magic, mystery, spontaneity, originality and creativity have been sacrificed. He states that individual personalities and sensitivities have been gripped and dominated by the need to be efficient, predictable, standardised and uniform in codes of conduct. Ritzer (2000, p. 144) explains that this process is required to ensure that tasks are performed efficiently and uniformly to guarantee the desired results are obtained. Ultimately, he suggests that it is a destructive and dehumanising process that is sweeping Western culture. Gruneau (1999) says intensifying the need to win (e.g., professionalism, expectations and standards) has forced new ways to achieving targets with sportsmen and women becoming increasingly prepared to cheat to get their way. Morgan (1994, p. 63) comments that sport is riddled with irrevocable contradictions and comes under the cloak of unreality, despite its obvious ties to larger society. The thing driving this utterly unattractive process forward is a blind and sickly pursuit of money. Morgan (1994, p.130) says that Ken Norton's lament that "boxing is a wonderful sport but a dirty business" perhaps most accurately describes the situation. The leftist theorists do not underestimate the need to preserve basic sporting principles. Morgan (1994, p. 139) says, "The pursuit of wealth, fame, power in our society is thought to be incompatible with the exercise of virtues such as honesty, justice and temperance.

Most professional sports particularly football not only accept, but appear to be controlled by their responsibility towards upholding, maintaining and projecting national cultural standards. (Guttmann, 2004). From a leftist viewpoint, on a professional level the demands of globalisation and modernity continue to permeate sports like football turning them into demonstrations or "sermons" of "so called" suitable patterns of behaviour and correct thinking (Lasch, 2018). From this viewpoint, modern sports have become mere interpretations and displays of national cultural attitudes and beliefs that are considered appropriate for global consumption rather than spontaneous and original celebrations of the essence of human endeavour (Morgan, 1999). Such distortion and overbearing control seems to have banished simplicity and innocence in modes of existence in professional sport almost to extinction. Huizinga (cited in Maguire, 2001) said that the increasing systematisation and regimentation of sport, has significantly devalued and degraded the special quality of "pure play sport."

IV. CONCLUSION

Sport will always have a vital role to play in society, as it fundamentally is positive in all that it offers. Sports role in society is continually diversifying to meet the climate of change. It is fair to say that basic organised sport in the community is available for recreation and to provide an opportunity for people to let off steam. On a professional level it has become a way of earning a living and as a consequence become more controlled. Physical training, coaching, nutritional advice, practise sessions, diet control, psychological training, setting goals and targets are required to ensure that players meet the high standards expected by the viewers. Sport however is still able to maintain a large chunk of its original essence through schools, colleges, universities, leisure centres and health centres. It is through these venues that sport will be able to function most closely to its amateurism format. These establishments harbour values linked to pure enjoyment, fun, well-being, general fitness and recreation where the love of sport will continue to flourish.

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