

FROM RITUAL TO RECORD

The Nature of Modern Sports

*Updated with a New Afterword*

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amusement, like children suddenly captivated by a whim, the activity would have been a nonutilitarian one phenomenologically indistinguishable from the utilitarian work that was done.

Huizinga was concerned with contests rather than with play or noncompetitive games. It is probably the case that the movement from play through games and contests to sports involves an increasing degree of spatial-temporal separateness. The more highly structured the event, the more precisely demarcated and set aside from ordinary time and space; but even the most strictly conventionalized "judic frame" can be broken. In his many guises, the "spoilsport" stands ready to dispell the illusion and to allow the rainbow world of play to "fade into the light of common day."<sup>29</sup>

Having responded to the questions raised by Frayssinet and by Huizinga, let us return once again to our paradigm in which sports are "playful" physical contests. Our paradigm is a tool, a heuristic device, a helpful model. Not only is it ahistorical, we have preferred it to the more directly, more grandly historical paradigms developed by Roberts, Sutton-Smith, and Caillois. Our paradigm is a necessary abstraction, but in order to understand what is modern about modern sports, which is one of our two related purposes, we must understand what was not modern about the sports of earlier times. Having been somewhat philosophical for a few pages, we must now become historical.

## III

### From Ritual to Record

**ONE WAY TO** understand a phenomenon is to see it against the background of what it is not. When Mark Twain was informed that Albert Spalding's touring baseball team had played an exhibition game in the Hawaiian Islands, he marveled at the cultural contrast:<sup>1</sup>

*I have visited the Sandwich Islands . . . where life is one long, slumberless Sabbath, the climate one long, delicious summer day . . . And these boys have played baseball there!—baseball, which is the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century! One cannot realize it; the place and the fact are so incongruous; it's like interrupting a funeral with a circus.*

Funeral and circus are not the most precise metaphors, but the Gestalt of modern sports does appear in sharply delineated contrast against the background of primitive, ancient, and medieval sports.

Seen in this fashion, the distinguishing characteristics of modern sports, as contrasted with those of previous eras, are seven in number. They are easy enough to name, but their implications, ramifications, mutual relations, and ultimate significance require precise and somewhat extended analysis. Like other cultural facts, they are likely to be taken for granted and to be thought of as self-evidently "natural" by members of the culture while they seem strange to those who ap-

proach them from the outside. Stated now in their most abstract form, simply as a means to indicate the direction of the analysis, the seven characteristics are

secularism,  
equality of opportunity to compete and in the conditions of competition,  
specialization of roles,  
rationalization,  
bureaucratic organization,  
quantification,  
the quest for records.

It is not likely that the student of Max Weber or Talcott Parsons will respond with alarm to such a list of characteristics, but very few Americans have attempted what might be called the historical sociology—or the sociological history—of sports. European scholars, especially the Germans, have been much more extensively involved in the serious study of sport as a social phenomenon. It is time to draw upon both American and European work in order to advance the discussion beyond its present boundaries.

### 1. THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR

Primitive cultures rarely have a word for sport in our sense.<sup>2</sup> If we hold strictly to our definition of sport as a nonutilitarian physical contest, we may be tempted to say that primitive men had no sports at all. Carl Diem's monumental world history of sports begins with the bold assertion, "All physical exercises were originally cultic."<sup>3</sup> Plentiful evidence exists to document the claim that primitive societies frequently incorporated running, jumping, throwing, wrestling, and even ball playing in their religious rituals and ceremonies.

Ethnographers have done a great deal of work on the games of the American Indians, especially of the Plains Indians who were the last to fall under the cultural influence of their conquerors. In his enormous compendium, Stewart Culin writes:<sup>4</sup>

*Children have a variety of other amusements, such as top spinning, mimic fights, and similar imitative sports, but the games first described are played*

*only by men and women, or youths and maidens, not by children, and usually at fixed seasons as the accompaniment of certain festivals or religious rites. . . . In general, games appear to be played ceremonially, as pleasing to the gods, with the object of securing fertility, causing rain, giving and prolonging life, expelling demons, or curing sickness.*

Culin's collection of ethnographic information does not, with rare exceptions, actually elucidate the religious nature of the games, but an excellent example is available from a later account.

The Jicarilla Apaches of the Southwest used "sports" in conjunction with solar-lunar symbolism as part of a yearly fertility rite. Apache myth dramatizes the delicate balance between the two main sources of food among Plains Indians. Animal sources were associated with the sun, vegetable sources with the moon. "The sun is connected with the animal and the moon with the fruit because the sun is a man and the moon is a woman."<sup>5</sup> This dualistic conception of natural order is one that Claude Lévi-Strauss and many other anthropologists posit as an inevitable facet of *la pensée sauvage*. Writing about the Timbira Indians of Brazil, Káthe Hye-Kerkdal emphasizes the connection between the sport and the world-view: "Athletic contests and the dualistic social organization of primitive peoples can be characterized as two different representations of a polarized picture of the world (*aines polaren Weltbildes*)."<sup>6</sup> The enactment of the dualistic myth which interests us at present is a kind of relay race in which all males participated at least once between puberty and marriage. One side represented the sun, the other side the moon. The race was governed by complicated rituals. Abstinence from meat and from sexual intercourse was required prior to the race. The track was called "the Milky Way" after the heavenly path over which the sun and the moon had originally raced. The "Milky Way" connected two circles around whose circumference small holes were dug, clockwise, into which the leaders of the two sides, praying all the while, dropped pollen. Trees were then planted in the holes. This and other rituals were accompanied by drums representing the sun and the moon, by flags, dances, songs, a feast. The race itself was on the third day of the festival, at which time a fire was ignited in the center of each circle. The boys were painted, pollened, adorned with feathers, and led to their circles by two young girls carrying an ear of corn in one

hand, an eagle feather in the other (symbolizing the two sources of food). Four old men paced out the track, then came the race itself. The ceremony was clearly more important than the question of winning or losing. The leaders ran first, followed by the others in no particular order. Some ran four or five times, but everyone ran at least once. Dances and another feast followed the conclusion of the race.<sup>7</sup>

A second example of cultic sport is not, strictly speaking, drawn from a primitive society, because the Zulu soccer players of Durban, South Africa, are members of a transitional culture between tribal and modern social organization. Their game, soccer, is the most widespread of modern ballgames, but their perception of the game assimilates it to a way of life anything but modern. Zulu soccer teams play by the rules of the International Football Association and the desire to perform well can lead to behavior which directly violates Zulu custom. A coach or trainer, for instance, may strike an older player—a clear instance of an imperative of modern sport overriding a traditional tabu. Other aspects of the “soccer culture” are contributions of the Zulus themselves. There is a preseason and a postseason sacrifice of a goat. Pregame ritual requires that players, coaches, and dedicated supporters of the team spend the night before a game together—sleeping in a huge group around a camp fire. All are naked, but there are no sexual relations. A witch doctor, called an “Inyanga,” makes incisions in the knees, elbows, and other joints of the players (very much like the medicine man in the ritual ball game of the Cherokee Indians). The players are also given a purifying emetic. On the day of the game, there is a procession, a movement in tight formation with each man touching those adjacent to him. The Inyanga administers magic potions. When the team is unsuccessful, it is the Inyanga, rather than the coach or manager, who is replaced.<sup>8</sup> My examples demonstrate the concurrence of sport and religious cult, but Carl Diem’s comment implies not merely the possibility but also the inevitability of this concurrence. His generalization forces an implied question upon us: Is sport among primitive peoples invariably a part of religion or is there an independent sector where sports are simply a part of secular life? The question supposes that primitive people have a secular life, which some authorities deny, arguing instead that primitive religious life was coterminous with culture. The

question has a special significance in light of our preliminary paradigm of play—games—contests—sports. If we decide that sports among primitive peoples were always sacred, always part of cult, then we are forced to the somewhat curious conclusion that they had no sports at all in our sense because their physical contests were religious in nature and thus in an extended sense utilitarian. They were for an ulterior purpose—like assuring the earth’s fertility—rather than for the sheer pleasure of the activity itself.

But is Diem right? I think not. From ethnographic reports we can document many instances of cultic sports, but we cannot meaningfully stretch the term “religion” to the point where all human behavior falls within the sphere of the sacred. Children wrestling or casting spears at a target? It is difficult to think of their actions as part of a cult. Although Käthe Hye-Kerkdal’s account of the arduous “log-races” of the Timbira Indians of Brazil makes clear the cultic significance of many of the races, some of them seem to have been secular activities pursued for their own sake.<sup>9</sup> Dogmatic proclamations of negative universals (“Primitive peoples have no secular sports”) are unwise. Nonetheless, Diem’s overstatement contains an important truth—sports, as opposed to “physical exercises,” may indeed have entered the lives of primitive adults primarily in conjunction with some form of religious significance. It is a fault of our own pervasive secularism that we tend to underestimate the cultic aspects of primitive sports.

Among the most thoroughly documented and intensively studied of all religious sports was the ball game of the Mayans and Aztecs, whose complex civilization we can classify as ancient rather than primitive. Although my subsequent discussions of ancient sports will concentrate on classical antiquity rather than on the distant pasts of China, India, and other “non-Western” cultures, the prominent place of the Mayan-Aztec ball-court game in anthropological literature, plus the intrinsic interest of the activity, justify the use of this example.

Behind the game itself was the myth of twin brothers whose names appear in various transliterations. The brothers left their mother’s house in order to challenge the gods of the underworld in a game of football (actually soccer of sorts). They lost and paid the mythically

predictable price of defeat—death. The head of one brother was placed in a tree, where a young girl happened upon it. From the mouth of the head spouted a stream of seeds which impregnated the girl, who removed to the house of the twin's mother, where she bore children. They grew to youthful manhood and challenged the gods at football and, again predictably, won. Whereupon the heads of the twins rose to the heavens and became the sun and the moon.<sup>10</sup>

The archeological evidence for this sun-moon myth can be found in the more than forty ball courts which have been located in an area stretching from Arizona to Guatemala and Honduras. Considered as symbols of the heavens, the ball courts are invariably within a temple complex, the best preserved of which is at Chichén Itzá in Yucatán. In Aztec times, the game itself was under the protection of the goddess Xochiquetzal, but the stone rings through which the ball seems to have been propelled were carved with the symbols of Quetzalcoatl, the famed plumed serpent. To these and other gods, thousands of human sacrifices were offered annually, some of them in direct connection with the ball game. Whether the losing players or the winning ones were sacrificed is unclear, but we can safely assume that the requirements of the contest *qua* contest doomed the losers rather than the winners. In either event, the archeological evidence indicates clearly that the game was quite literally for life or death. Each of the six reliefs at the great ball court of Chichén Itzá shows the decapitation of a player. On the whole, details about the actual playing of the game are meager and much disputed, but Spanish observers of the sixteenth century clearly saw the religious nature of the activity and one of them noted, "Every tennis-court was a temple."<sup>11</sup> The Spanish authorities banned the game—if game it was.<sup>12</sup>

Although Greek sports may be conceived of as the ancestors of modern sports, the physical contests of Olympia and Delphi were culturally closer to those of primitive peoples than to our own Olympics. The relative familiarity of Greek culture and the revival of specific track and field sports in our own time act to obscure fundamental similarities between the sports of the Athenians and those of the Apaches and Aztecs. The problem is only in part a lack of information. Book XXIII of the *Iliad*, containing the funeral games celebrated in honor of the slain Patroclus, is merely the first, and most

important, of numerous literary texts which are the heritage of every educated person. Athletic encounters depicted on Greek vases remain a part of the aesthetic experience of Western man and Myron's *Discus Thrower* must rank among the best known statues ever sculpted. Although our knowledge of Greek sports is marked by many lacunae, the problem is less one of information than of interpretation.

The Olympic games, like the Pythian, the Isthmian, the Nemean, and the Athenaic, were sacred festivals, integral aspects of the religious life of the ancient Hellenes. In the words of one scholar, "The Olympic games were sacred games, staged in a sacred place and at a sacred festival; they were a religious act in honor of the deity. Those who took part did so in order to serve the god and the prizes which they won came from the god. . . . The Olympic games had their roots in religion."<sup>13</sup> The games at Olympia were in homage to Zeus. Those of Corinth—the Isthmian games—were sacred to Poseidon, while Apollo was worshipped by the runners and wrestlers of Delphi and Nemea. (See table 1.)<sup>14</sup>

Table 1  
Greek Athletic Festivals

Festival	Place	God Honored	Branch or Wreath	Intervals (years)	Founded (B.C.)
Olympic	Olympia	Zeus	olive	4	776
Pythian	Delphi	Apollo	bay	4	582
Isthmian	Corinth	Poseidon	pine	2	582
Nemean	Nemea	Apollo	parsley	2	573

The exact history of the origins of the Olympic games is unknown and in all likelihood never will be known. It is thought that Olympia was first sacred to Gea, goddess of the earth. Greek legend told also of Pelops ("producer of abundance") and of his suitor's victory in the chariot-race against Oenomaus, father of Hippodamia. It was said that Herakles inaugurated the games at the tomb of Pelops, who was considered to have been brought back to life by the sacrifice of a boy. Defeat in an athletic contest was thus the symbolic substitute for sac-

rificial death. (Contemporary football coaches who liken defeat to death are better anthropologists than they realize.) Since Herakles had been a Minoan fertility god whom the conquering Greeks demoted to a demi-god and hero, the fertility myth is the common thread of every version of the founding of the games. By classical times the games were marked by a kind of syncretism—the altar of Cea remained as one of the four at Olympia, the funeral rites of Pelops were celebrated on the second day of the games, and the great sacrifice to Zeus took place on the third day. The purpose of the games remained cultic, religious. The athletic events were “held in order to persuade the god to return from the dead, to reappear in the form of a new shoot emerging from the dark womb of the earth into the light of day.”<sup>15</sup>

The time of the games was as sacred to the Greeks as the place. The games occurred at the time of the second or third full moon after the summer solstice, and three heralds went forth to announce the Olympic truce. The athletes gathered at the nearby town of Elis and spent thirty days in final preparation for their exertions, after which came a two-day procession with much religious ceremony to the actual site on the river Eurotas. Because of the sacred nature of the games, women were excluded even as spectators, except for the priestess of Demeter. The games expanded over time from the simple stade race (one length of the stadium) in 776 B.C. to an elaborate program of foot races, chariot races, boxing, wrestling, a combination of boxing and wrestling known as the *pankration*, discus and javelin throwing. There were contests for boys as well as men and, from 396 B.C., contests for trumpeters and heralds. According to most accounts, the fifth and last day was devoted entirely to religious ceremony. There was a banquet, the gods were solemnly thanked for their sponsorship of the games, the winners were awarded olive branches cut from the sacred grove of Zeus by a boy whose two parents were still alive. The religious character of the Olympic games was never in doubt, nor was that of the other “crown” games (thus named because the victors were crowned with olive, bay, pine, or parsley wreaths).

With this information in mind we can return to the contention of Frayssinet that sports are forms of artistic expression. “The study of

various Greek religious ceremonies teaches us that one can always please the gods by offering them . . . music, dance, poetry, drama and athletic contests.”<sup>16</sup> The “crown” games, and many hundreds of local games, were indeed a way to please the gods, but this fact should not incline us to the conclusion that sports are one with music, dance, poetry, drama, and the other arts. The relationship of sport and art among the Greeks was the opposite of that suggested by Frayssinet. To the degree that Greek athletic festivals were religious ritual and artistic expression, they had a purpose beyond themselves and ceased to be sports in our strictest definition of the term. The closer the contests came to the status of art, the further they departed from that of sport.

The Olympic and other “crown” games were sacred festivals, and athletic events were often endowed with religious significance; but we can nonetheless detect among the Greeks the emergence of sports as a more or less secular phenomenon too. The remark of a German scholar is relevant. “When one speaks in this context of ‘secularization,’ one does not mean that an originally religious phenomenon becomes worldly but rather that an athletic game (*sportliches Spiel*), originally laden with religious significance, concentrated itself upon its own essential elements—play, exercise, competition.”<sup>17</sup> This is what happened. Sports gradually became a part of the ordinary life of the *polis* as well as a means of worship. That Greek society generally valued physical excellence is obvious from any examination of Hellenic civilization. Cities gloried in the athletic victories of their citizens, rewarded the victors materially with large pensions and other benefits, honored them in legend, in the form of statues, and in some of the greatest poetry ever written (the Olympic odes of Pindar, for instance). Socrates, who had participated in the Isthmian games, admired physical excellence and scorned those who took no pride in their bodies. Even Plato, who never wavered from his conviction that the world of pure ideas was of a higher order than the sphere of the corporeal, had been a wrestler in his youth and had won prizes at the Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian games. And in *The Republic* he insisted upon the importance of gymnastic exercises for both men and women. Ordinary citizens emulated the achievements of the most gifted and no city was without its athletic facilities. We can be sure

that those who exercised in the gymnasium did not neglect to offer libations to the gods, but we can nonetheless detect the secularization of sport.

Roman society continued and accelerated the tendency. The Romans were given neither to athletic competitions nor to athletic festivals. They believed in physical fitness for the ulterior end of warfare. In his classic study of sports in antiquity, E. Norman Gardiner wrote, "The only athletic events which interested them at all were the fighting events, wrestling, boxing, and the pankration."<sup>18</sup> Roman moralists tended to mock the degeneracy of those who revealed an interest in Greek athletics. "The Greek principle of a harmonious development of the body, and a striving for bodily beauty and grace, was considered effeminate."<sup>19</sup> Not even Scipio Africanus, the famous conqueror of Hannibal in the Third Punic War, was immune from the verbal darts of his fellow citizens when he appeared at the gymnasium in Greek clothing. Not even the imperial prestige of Augustus was sufficient for him to establish "isolympic" games patterned on the Greek model. Such festivals as existed were usually occasions for Roman spectators to watch Greek athletes from Pergamon, Antioch, or Alexandria. More typical for Roman tastes than races or the discus were the gladiatorial combats which date from the funeral celebrations for the father of Marcus and Decimus Brutus in 264 B. C. It is common knowledge that gladiatorial spectacles reached bestial enormity by imperial times. Whatever religious significance remained was apparently overshadowed in the eyes of the mob accustomed to bread and circuses and blood.

In their secularism as in most of their other characteristics, modern sports are closer to the Roman than to the Greek model. It is, indeed, precisely this pervasive secularism which made modern sports suspect in the view of many religious leaders of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. After long and stubborn opposition to the allegedly misplaced emphasis on the body symbolized in Greek athletics, both Catholicism and Protestantism have worked out a *modus vivendi*, a kind of concordat, with modern sports. Theologians now repudiate the harsh condemnations of earlier generations and blame Platonism and Neo-Platonism for the ascetic strain in traditional Christianity. Churchmen now seek eagerly to establish the harmony

of modern sports and Christian doctrine.<sup>20</sup> The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York has a stained-glass window depicting baseball and other modern sports, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes endeavors to leaven the hard ethos of football and basketball and hockey with the words of Jesus, and in a popular song of the 1970s, the singer asks, in a refrain, that Jesus drop kick him "through the goal-posts of life."<sup>21</sup>

There is, however, a fundamental difference between obligatory pregame lockerroom prayers and the worship of the gods by means of an athletic festival. For the Jicarilla Apache running between the circles of the sun and the moon or the Athenian youth racing in the stadium built above the sacred way at Delphi, the contest was in itself a religious act. For most contemporary athletes, even for those who ask for divine assistance in the game, the contest is a secular event. The Sermon on the Mount does not interfere with hard blocking and determined tackling. Religion remains on the sidelines.

Unless sports themselves take on a religious significance of their own. One of the strangest turns in the long, devious route that leads from primitive ritual to the World Series and the *Fußballweltmeisterschaft* is the proclivity of modern sports to become a kind of secular faith. Young men, and many no longer young, seem quite literally to worship the heroes of modern sports. Journalists, referring to the passion of the Welsh for rugby or the devotion of Texans to football, speak of sports as the "religion" of the populace. "Sport," says an Australian authority, "is the ultimate Australian super-religion, the one thing every Australian believes in passionately."<sup>22</sup> Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic games, spoke reverently of the "religio athletae" and the French version of Leni Riefenstahl's monumental documentary film of the 1936 Olympics was entitled *Les Dieux du stade*. Michael Novak's ecstatic homage to the joy of sports contains a reference to baseball, football, and basketball as a "holy trinity." He goes on to maintain that sports are "secular religions, civil religions. . . . The athlete may of course be pagan, but sports are, as it were, natural religions."<sup>23</sup> If we shift our attention from philosophic ecstasy to sophistic irony, we can consider the name given by the students of Notre Dame University to their library's mosaic of Christ with upraised arms: "Six Points."<sup>24</sup>

Whether or not one considers the passions, the rituals, and the myths of modern sports as a secular religion, the fundamental contrast with primitive and ancient sports remains. The bond between the secular and the sacred has been broken, the attachment to the realm of the transcendent has been severed.<sup>25</sup> Modern sports are activities partly pursued for their own sake, partly for other ends which are equally secular. We do not run in order that the earth be more fertile. We till the earth, or work in our factories and offices, so that we can have time to play.

## 2. EQUALITY

The first distinguishing characteristic of modern sports is, therefore, that they are far more secular than primitive and ancient sports. The second characteristic of modern sports is equality in two senses of that complex concept: (1) everyone should, theoretically, have an opportunity to compete; (2) the conditions of competition should be the same for all contestants. In actual practice, there are numerous inequalities, which will occupy us at some length when we consider not the conceptual model but the contemporary state of affairs. Nonetheless, the principle is clear. Modern sports assume equality. For primitive societies, however, participation is likely to be on the basis of membership in a caste or kinship group. In Max Weber's classic formulation, ascription rather than achievement governs. For the Jicarilla rite described earlier, whether or not a young man has reached puberty is decisive, not his swiftness of foot. The young girls who accompany the runners to the circles of the sun and moon must be virgins, a status indifferent to the achievement principle.

The relationship between equality and the achievement principle is a vital one.<sup>26</sup> Swiftness of foot and strength of hand are less relevant for primitive sports than membership in the proper group, because these sports are often not really contests at all. In many of them, the outcome is determined by religious necessity, not by athletic ability. There is no need to guarantee everyone a chance to "make the team," because the team was made aeons ago, by the gods, who divided the village into two opposed moities. There is no need to

equalize the conditions of competition, because the outcome too was more likely than not determined by the gods rather than by the relative skill of the participants. The dominance of ascription over achievement is rarely complete. When the wrestlers of two clans approach each other and grapple, they are presumably involved in a struggle for physical mastery as well as in a complex religious ceremony, but we must be attentive; they crack their sinews because the gods demand the effort—even when both of them know that one of them is destined to win.

Examples are helpful and Raymond Firth has provided us with a classic one. Among the Polynesians there was a kind of sacred dart or spear game known variously as *tēka* (Maori), *tika* (Samoan), or *tinga* (Fijian). *Tapu* ("sacredness") belonged to the game, which was probably a fertility rite. The two sides consisted of approximately twelve to twenty players each, drawn from families and clans so that a man was invariably on one side or the other. Curiously, the two sides are denominated "bachelors" and "married men" although both sides are now (i.e., at the time of Firth's visit) actually constituted without regard to marital status. It is apparent that the fertility rite which originally governed the selection of the sides had, by 1930, faded from prominence. It is also clear that the new principle of selection was based on ascription rather than on some notion of equal competition like that embodied in the technique known to every modern child—choosing sides by letting the two captains pick in turn until the talent has been allotted.<sup>27</sup>

Just as the Zulus of Durban exemplify a curious mixture of primitive and modern traits in their approach to football, so do the Eskimos of Point Hope in Alaska enable us to see the contrast between teams chosen by ascription and by achievement. Although the Eskimos of the village speak English, worship in the Episcopalian Church, wear more American than traditional clothing, and seem greatly to enjoy the game of baseball, which they play by modern rules, they have also preserved their fondness for an older game roughly like soccer. In this traditional football game, the goals are several hundred yards apart and the ball is kicked across the goal (not into a net). Men, women, and children play and the sides are made up of the "land people" versus the "point or sea people." The land



people kick the ball toward the sea, which lies to the west of the village, and the sea people kick the ball landwards. It is, of course, the kinship system that divided the players into land and sea people. Finally, according to the old rules, only elderly men and women were entitled to pick the ball up and throw it. Age has its compensations, at least in this primitive society.<sup>28</sup>

Among the ancient Greeks, achievement counted for more and ascription for less than among primitive peoples, but it was by no means assumed that everyone should be allowed to compete. The elegies of the poet Propertius and statues now standing in the Louvre, the Vatican Museum, and the National Museum in Athens prove that Greek art did not totally neglect female athletes, but women were barred from Olympia and most other games. When women did compete, it was separately, as at the Heraean games which followed the far more important Olympic festival. Similarly, Greek sports were closed to slaves and to "barbarians," i.e., to all who were not Greek. Within these parameters, however, each man—no matter what his social rank—was free to prove himself a worthy competitor at his chosen event. The classical scholars M. I. Finley and H. W. Pleket indicate how extraordinary this equality was: "Every competitor had the same formal rights, under the same rules, and could claim the prize if he won; only his own skill and strength mattered. In a world of built-in inequalities, that was a significant rarity."<sup>29</sup> Legend has it, probably wrongly, that the first winner at the earliest recorded Olympic celebration in 776 B. C. was a cook.<sup>30</sup>

Equality of the conditions of competition was important to the Greeks and they went to considerable trouble to avoid certain inequalities. Men were separated from boys on the basis of size and physical maturity rather than chronological age. A boy who had matured rapidly competed among the men and not among the *ephebes*, against whom he might have had an unfair advantage. The finest example of the concern for fair competition is probably in the matter of oiling and dusting. All Greek athletes rubbed themselves with olive oil before the contest. Wrestlers were then sprinkled with a fine powder, to make the struggle something other than a slippery mismatch. To insure that neither wrestler had the advantage of an undusted patch of skin, they sprinkled each other. Curiously, however, the Greeks

did not divide wrestlers or boxers into classes by weight or size, as we do.

During the events of an athletic festival, officials watched for possible unfairness, which they apparently punished forthwith. Numerous vases contain pictures of the officials whipping athletes who had committed an infraction of the rules. Needless to say, primitive sports, with their frequent lack of emphasis on winning or losing, were supervised by ritual adepts rather than by officials.

To the degree that Roman athletic sports were modeled on Greek, they accepted the principle of equality of terms of competition, but it is apparent that gladiatorial contests were organized on different principles. In the arena, swordsmen fought men armed with nets and tridents, men fought animals, and the audience lusted for ever more improbable encounters which depraved emperors hastened to provide. In 90 A. D., the emperor Domitian titillated the populace with a combat of dwarves against women.<sup>31</sup> By this date, the gladiators were almost always slaves rather than citizens, a complete reversal of the Greek view of participation.

The Roman fondness for inequality in gladiatorial combats provides us with an unexpected clue to the status of such different sports as bull-fighting and mountain-climbing. The first sport is very old. Murals discovered by Sir Arthur Evans in ancient Crete depict a kind of acrobatic bull-fight which was probably a part of religious ritual.<sup>32</sup> The second sport is startlingly recent—the Alpine Club of London was founded in 1857 and the Matterhorn was first scaled in 1865—and apparently without conventional religious connotations. Neither sport makes any pretense of equality of conditions of competition. If we imagine the contest to be one of man against nature in the form of the charging bull or the forbidding peak, then the inequality is obvious. If we take a more abstract view and imagine the contest to be a mediated one of man against man, both tested by the same natural difficulty, it is equally obvious that the natural difficulty is not always the same. Some bulls are less fierce than others. Even when the same face of the same mountain is scaled, the conditions change with the weather, with the season. And the glory harvested by a first ascent can never be repeated by subsequent climbers, who must find new peaks to conquer.

There is little doubt that modern sports now embody the principle of equality, which is carried far beyond the point reached by the Greeks. Theorists can comfortably assert that sports are rationally organized "on the basis of the universalistic criterion of achievement," but the tenet of equal access to the contest has consistently limped behind the much more completely institutionalized tenet of equal conditions of competition.<sup>33</sup> Because our present confusions apropos of the amateur rule derive from medieval notions beyond which even Greek sports had evolved, it is necessary to look attentively at the slow development of the tenet of equal access to the contest.

In medieval times, jousts and tournaments were limited to the nobility. Knights who sullied their honor by inferior marriages—to peasant girls, for instance—were disbanded. If they were bold enough to enter a tournament despite their loss of status, and were discovered, they were beaten and their weapons were broken. Peasants reckless enough to emulate the sport of their masters were punished by death.

In the evolution of medieval society toward modern modes of organization, the strict inequality of feudal sports lingered on. The game of court-tennis—an ancestor of our lawn-tennis—was forbidden to servants and laborers in 1388 and in 1410.<sup>34</sup> The game was an aristocratic and regal passion. Henry VIII had his private facilities at Hampton Court. In this instance, class clearly mattered more than sex, for women were not excluded and a certain Margot de Hainault was mentioned in 1427 as superior to the best male tennis-players of Paris.<sup>35</sup> In 1541, six years after Henry VIII repeated the decree restricting tennis to noblemen and property-owners, bowling was prohibited except for noblemen and those "having manors, lands or tenements, to the yearly value of one hundred pounds or above."<sup>36</sup> James I repeated the ban in 1618. Feudal restraints were found even in the colonies. In Virginia in 1674, a tailor was fined because he dared to race his horse against a gentleman's.<sup>37</sup> Nor can we say that class restrictions are wholly absent from our own society. In the regulations for the Henley Regatta of 1879, we read, "No person shall be considered an amateur oarsman or sculler . . . Who is or has been by trade or employment for wages, a mechanic, artisan, or laborer."<sup>38</sup> (Among

those excluded from Henley was the father of Princess Grace of Monaco.)

In an unusually fine essay, Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard have analyzed the split in British sport which took place in 1895 when dissident clubs of the Rugby Football Union broke away and formed the openly professional Rugby League. The immediate conflict was over the rigid amateurism of the Rugby Football Union, which not only banned cash payments for time lost from work but also threatened to expel players or clubs receiving medals. The deeper disagreement was, however, on the nature of sport as a social institution. The bitterness of the controversy derived largely from upper-class and upper-middle-class fears that "their" game was falling into the hands of lower-middle-class elements, especially in the industrial north of England. "In other words, even though the public school elite tended to rationalize their ethos in sport-specific terms and claimed they were interested solely in preserving the 'essential character' of sport, class and regional hostility and resentment over the loss of their erstwhile dominance played an important part."<sup>39</sup> The amateur rule was an instrument of class warfare.

An American observer of 1895 found the class divisions of English sport perfectly sound:<sup>40</sup>

*Why there should be such constant strife to bring together in sport the two divergent elements of society that never by any chance meet elsewhere on even terms is quite incomprehensible, and it is altogether the sole cause of all our athletic woe. . . . The laboring class are all right in their way; let them go their way in peace, and have their athletics in whatsoever manner best suits their inclinations. . . . Let us have our own sport among the more refined elements, and allow no discordant spirits to enter into it.*

As late as 1960, an English authority defended the exclusion of mechanics, artisans, and laborers as "the only way to keep the sport pure from the elements of corruption. . . . It is argued, with much show of truth, that the average workman has no idea of sport for its own sake."<sup>41</sup>

The attempt to limit sports to gentlemen of means still survives in the anachronistic amateur rule. The rule derives partly from medieval conceptions of social hierarchy, partly from the Renaissance ideal of the courtier who was skilled at many activities but supreme

(by dint of hard practice) at none of them, partly—as we have seen—from the class relationships of nineteenth-century society. Since no one seriously contends today that participation in sports should be limited by class membership, the first and third of these justifications for the amateur rule are ludicrously inapt. The second justification, rooted in the notion that someone who simply seeks diversion at an activity should not be asked to compete with someone else for whom it is a way of life, is much more difficult to deal with. One might argue that the exclusion of the highly trained and specialized athlete preserves equality of competition, but this argument is specious because (1) it is exactly this inequality of athletic ability that sports are all about in the first place and (2) the present amateur rule does not exclude the highly trained and specialized but rather those who openly receive payments in money. It is certain that the criterion of pecuniary compensation does not distinguish between those who devote a moderate portion of their lives to sports and those for whom sport has become a way of life. There is no way in which the present amateur rule enhances equality in what the Germans call *Hochleistungssport* (“sport at the highest level of achievement”). Western nations must eventually abolish the amateur-professional distinction in its present form because it has long since become anachronistic and because it is corroded by hypocrisy and mocked by the practice of Communist nations whose “amateurs” devote at least as much time to sports as do our “professionals.”

Exclusion on the basis of class is clearly an anomaly within the structure of modern sports. Exclusion on the basis of race is just as clearly anomalous. It is, nonetheless, common knowledge that racism has hindered the development of modern sports in the United States, South Africa, and many other countries. Although fourteen of the fifteen jockeys who rode in the first Kentucky Derby of 1875 were Negroes, blacks were soon forced out of this profitable occupation, from which they continue to be almost completely blocked. Although numerous blacks boxed well enough to have been contenders for the heavyweight championship, it was not until Jack Johnson's defeat of Tommy Burns in 1908 that the color bar was lowered enough to allow a black fighter to compete for the mantle of John L. Sullivan, Gentleman Jim Corbett, and Bob Fitzsimmons. Although

Moses Fleetwood Walker and several other blacks played in professional baseball in the 1880s, Negroes were gradually excluded and left with no alternative but to begin their own leagues, which flourished, floundered, and rose again from dormancy until the memorable moment in 1947 when Jackie Robinson stepped onto the field to play ball for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Although William H. Lewis and William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson played football for Amherst College in the 1890s, the National Football League rejected black athletes until the 1940s.<sup>42</sup>

By 1970, 24.5 percent of all major-league baseball players, 33.7 percent of all NFL football players, and 54.3 percent of the National Basketball Association were black.<sup>43</sup> Afro-Americans earned more money on the average than their white counterparts, but discrimination and inequality remained in forms more subtle than lower pay or outright exclusion. Black athletes still find themselves “stacked” into certain positions (outfielders in baseball, running backs in football) and they seldom have opportunities to move into managerial positions.<sup>44</sup> They also continue to be underpaid in proportion to their ability.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, compared to the situation in the 1920s—the so-called “Golden Age of Sports”—the importance of race has diminished. Under intermittent pressure from abroad, there have also been changes in South African sport, which had been even more exclusionist than American in that blacks and whites had been prevented from mixed competition either in South Africa or abroad.<sup>46</sup>

Although Jews are not really a race, Nazi policy considered them to be one and the possible exclusion of Jews from the Olympic games of 1936 became a heated political controversy in the years just prior to the games. Rather devious political maneuvering on the part of Avery Brundage prevented the AAU from carrying out a threatened boycott, and outright duplicity on the part of the Nazis enabled them to promise to allow German Jews to try out for their team and then to bar all except the fencer Helene Meyer who, as a “half-Jew,” still had German citizenship. Among those excluded was Gretel Bergmann, a high jumper who had come within an inch of the world's record; her best of 1.6 meters was ignored and Elfriede Kaun, who cleared 1.54 meters was chosen in her place.<sup>47</sup>

Exclusion on the basis of sex has been the third anachronism

preventing the emergence of modern sport in its pure form. Although men's greater physical strength and quicker reaction time (from age five to age fifty-five) make direct competition with women unsuitable in many sports, the logic of the development of modern sports demands at the very least that women be granted separate-but-equal opportunity for involvement in sports. In actual practice, the exclusion of women from sports, i.e., from physical contests as opposed to physical education or play, has lasted longer than the exclusion of blacks. The first gymnastic facility for German women was established in 1832, but the first important gymnastics competition was staged in 1913.<sup>48</sup> As late as 1909, Prussian girls who contested the highjump and the longjump were judged for their grace and style as well as for height and distance.<sup>49</sup> Pierre de Coubertin opposed female participation in the Olympics and they were barred from official competition in most sports until the swimmers were admitted in 1912 and the track-and-field athletes in 1928. Weighing the pros and cons of "Olympics for girls," a contributor to *School and Society* wrote in 1929 that competition is natural to males but, "In woman it is profoundly unnatural." The author was opposed to the "masculinization" of girls. "Natural feminine health and attractiveness, whether physical, emotional or social, certainly are impaired if not destroyed by the belligerent attitudes and competitive spirit . . . which intense athletics inevitably fosters."<sup>50</sup> In 1930, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation petitioned the International Olympic Committee and requested that women be dropped from the program for 1932.<sup>51</sup> In the view of the Women's Division, such strenuous athletic contests were physically and psychologically unhealthy.

The prejudice against women athletes derived from Victorian attitudes about porcelain-doll femininity rather than from the fearful kind of discrimination that barred blacks from competition with whites. It was not direct hostility against women so much as overprotectiveness. A leading German scholar opined in 1853 that an "Amazon-like physical development runs directly counter to the true concept of womanly worth and grace."<sup>52</sup> More than a century later, a prominent British sportswriter and novelist came to the same conclusion.<sup>53</sup> It will probably be at least another generation before the

term "Amazon" drops out of use as a pejorative term for athletic women.

There were women, even in the 1890s, determined to defy conventions of femininity and to urge competitive athletics for women, but female coaches and administrators of women's sports were frequently among the sharpest critics of women's involvement in real contests.<sup>54</sup> In 1922, the Women's Division favored "Play Days" and "Sports Days" rather than intercollegiate meets, i.e., gala gatherings with more emphasis on sociability than on athletic achievement. Gradually, in the 1950s and 1960s, the women in charge of women's sports began to accept the idea of intercollegiate and even of national competition. The founding of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (1971) may be considered a sign that most female coaches and physical-education administrators have decided to accept if not actively to promote the principle of equal access to competitive sports. Changes in attitudes have been accompanied by changes in the law. The Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 empowered enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 outlawed sex bias in education, including physical education. Legal action has opened the Boston Marathon to women and has brought men's and women's physical-education budgets somewhat closer to parity—so that men's sports now rarely receive fifty times what women's sports receive at the same university or in the same school district.<sup>55</sup>

In the Communist societies of Eastern Europe, the effort to achieve equality for women's sports has from the first been a matter of governmental policy. Despite official propaganda and the availability of facilities attached to factories and offices, the actual rate of participation for ordinary women is approximately the same as in Western societies—the male-female participation ratio is rarely lower than 2-1.<sup>56</sup> At the international level, however, the extraordinary accomplishments in women's gymnastics, in track and field, rowing, and swimming, amply demonstrate the possibilities of modern sports for women as equality of opportunity is realized.

The stellar achievements of Colette Besson, Billie Jean King, and Kornelia Ender remind us that equality of opportunity is not the same as equality of results. When *all* have had their chance, we shall

know who is the best of all. In fact, the more equal the chance to participate, the more unequal the results will be. For men and for women, the distance between the ordinary athlete and the international champion is greater every year. There is an irony here which Günther Lüschen has expressed well: "While everywhere else in the modern world . . . there is at least an ideological tendency towards the elimination of social rank, sport contains an element of hierarchical social differentiation whose precise and objective gradations are scarcely to be found in any other ranking system."<sup>57</sup> Inequality of results is an essential characteristic of modern sports, which is often used to justify inequality in other areas, like education, where there is less equality of opportunity and in the conditions of competition.

### 3. SPECIALIZATION

Whatever may have been the case among the earliest men, primitive societies known to modern ethnography show elements of specialization of function. The specialization of New Guinean sports is different from that of the National Football League, but the difference is one of degree. Still, the difference is remarkable.

In fact, the difference between the sports of primitive societies and the athletics of classical antiquity is nearly as remarkable. It did not take the Greeks long to discover that some men were physically equipped to run and others to wrestle or throw the discus. "Before the close of the fifth century," wrote E. Norman Gardiner, "the excessive prominence given to bodily excellence and athletic success had produced specialization and professionalism."<sup>58</sup> The combination of prowess demonstrated by the pentathlon was in itself an indication that there were different specialties to be combined in a single test of more general ability. In the long course of Greek civilization, specialization did indeed lead to professionalization in the sense that athletes were officially remunerated and in the more important sense that they were able to devote themselves fully to their sports. Ample provided for by their enthusiastic fellow citizens, the athletes were freed from economic necessity and encouraged to make the most of their physical talents. Athletic festivals came to be dominated by pro-

professionals whom traditionalists like the dramatist Euripides abhorred. In his fragment *Autolykus*, he raged:<sup>59</sup>

*Of all the countless evils throughout Hellas none is worse than the race of athletes. . . . Slaves of their belly and their jaw they know not how to live well. . . . In youth they strut about in splendor, the idols of the city, but when bitter old age comes upon them they are cast aside like worn-out cloaks.*

The dramatist's disgust, aimed partly it seems at the ingratitude of the citizens vis-à-vis the ex-athlete, did no more than satire ever has to arrest the progressive professionalization of athletics. Five centuries later, in second-century Pergamon, the medical philosopher Galen was even more emphatic on the subject of professionalism:<sup>60</sup>

*Beneath their mass of flesh and blood their souls are stifled as in a sea of mud. . . . They have not health nor have they beauty. Even those who are naturally well proportioned become fat and bloated: their faces are often shapeless and unsightly owing to the wounds received in boxing and in the pankration. They lose their eyes and their teeth and their limbs are strained.*

Throughout the Roman Empire, the ubiquity of athletic professionalism helped to reduce the status of sports among moralists and philosophers, not because it was ignoble to receive money but because specialization distorted the many-sided development of the citizen. But there is no reason to think that the thousands who jammed the Circus Maximus in Rome to cheer on their favorite charioteer did not react as worshipfully as the contemporary millions who idolize Pelé, George Best, Franz Beckenbauer, and the other heroes of modern sport.

The sports of the medieval and early modern periods were probably a good deal less specialized than those of Roman times. The Renaissance ideal of the courtier, as propagated by Baldissare Castiglione and others, emphasized the harmonic cultivation of many skills rather than the intense concentration upon a single strength. Among the peasantry, specialization probably went no further than the selection of the physically powerful to represent the group at wrestling or lifting. The undifferentiatedness of medieval sports is especially clear in the village game which eventually became modern soccer.

In medieval football, there was room for everyone and a sharply defined role for no one. The game was played by the entire village

or, more likely still, by one village against another. Men, women, and children rushed to kick the ball and the devil took the hindmost. From the vantage point of a church tower, the players must have looked like a swarm of bees as they battled fiercely for possession of the ball. In a fine article, Eric Dunning comments on the marked lack of specialization in what he calls the "folk-games" of the medieval and early modern periods:<sup>61</sup>

*These games were relatively undifferentiated in the following three respects: (1) elements of what later became highly specialized games such as rugby, soccer, hockey, boxing, wrestling, and polo were often contained in a single game; (2) there was little division of labor among the players; and (3) no attempt was made to draw a hard and fast distinction between playing and spectating roles.*

The Middle Ages had their acrobats and tumblers and *jongleurs*, but they were not a period of athletic specialization.

What a contrast we see in modern sports! American football players are divided into twenty-two positions, not counting the "special" teams, which are restricted to placekicks, kickoffs, kickoff receptions, etc. An exchange of roles is possible but not common. A defensive lineman occasionally intercepts a forward pass and lumbers goalward in a moment of glory, but he quickly resumes his accustomed role. What is true of football is true of other modern sports. Baseball is an interesting example. Characterized from its invention in 1845 by a division of labor into nine separate playing positions, the game, at least in the American League, has recently edged toward a still higher degree of specialization akin to that found in football—the pitcher has become exclusively defensive and has been replaced offensively by the Designated Hitter. Will baseball eventually evolve into football's two-platoon system? Traditionalists shudder, but the natural interruption between halves of innings allows the possibility and the entire thrust of modern sports suggests that the possibility will one day be acted upon.

Specialization upon the modern field of play is paralleled by an intricate system of supportive personnel. Sociologists speak of primary, secondary, and tertiary involvement and discuss the roles of owners, managers, coaches, trainers, scouts, doctors, recruiters, referees and

umpires, schedulers, linesmen, groundsmen, ticket-takers, popcorn sellers, spectators, journalists, and even sports sociologists. Intercollegiate athletics, which began when students from Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard and Yale and Amherst and Williams began to challenge each other in rowing, rugby, and baseball, now involve departments of physical education and athletics staffed by a myriad of professionals trained in special graduate programs in sports administration.

Given the internal logic of modern sports, specialization and professionalization are inevitable. To an extent, they are the same thing. As we indicated in our comments on equality and the amateur rule, the crucial factor in professionalization is not money but time—how much of a person's life is dedicated to the achievement of athletic excellence? In other words, to what degree does a person specialize in such excellence? Since athletic achievement in a variety of sports is increasingly incompatible with top-level performance in any one of them, specialization tends to be narrower and narrower. Although I shall continue to defer to common usage and employ the term "professional" to describe those who openly receive pecuniary compensation, the professional is, in fact, any athlete specialized to the point where some single athletic excellence is for some extended period of time his main purpose in life. There are thoughtful arguments to the effect that we should consider those who pursue sports for the pleasure of the activity to be amateurs and those motivated by ulterior ends as professionals, but we have preferred to make this distinction the basic theoretical one between play of all kinds and the world of work.<sup>62</sup>

Specialization results from the characteristically modern stress on achievement which leads, in turn, to the desire to liberate the athlete from the bothersome, distracting details of economic necessity, whether this liberation is by means of a wealthy parent, a generous patron, an athletic scholarship, a government grant, or a straight salary. Despite the *Sturm und Drang* of the tedious controversies over the amateur rule, the plain fact is that world-class competition is usually incompatible with an ordinary vocation. *Someone* has to pay for Dorothy Hamill's icy figures and for Fran Tarkenton's scrambled patterns.

## 4. RATIONALIZATION

There must be rules of competition, even in the most primitive sports, simply because sports are by definition games, i.e., organized, rule-bound play. One might even plausibly argue that the ritual race of the Apaches had more rules and stricter enforcement than a modern game of soccer played by a group of schoolboys. Anthropologists have, after all, long since modified the Rousseauian notion of the perfect freedom of the Noble Savage; we realize that the primitive world is often one of totem and tabu, with hundreds of limitations and restraints. What sets the rules of modern sports aside from those of primitive peoples is less the number of rules than their nature. The origin and status of the rules are different. Modern games are rationalized in Max Weber's sense of *Zweckrationalität*, i.e., there is a logical relationship between means and ends. In order to do this, we have to do that. The rules of the game are perceived by us as means to an end. More importantly, new rules are invented and old ones discarded whenever the participants decide that ludic convenience outweighs the inertia of convention. The rules are cultural artifacts and not divine instructions. All parties to the scholarly disputes about the nature of the Mayan-Aztec ball games assume that the rules were traditional and sacred. Their origin was obviously unknown. They were not changed at yearly congresses called for that purpose.

Consider, in contrast, the invention of basketball by James Naismith on December 21, 1891, at the Y.M.C.A.'s training facilities in Springfield, Massachusetts. The very fact that we can name the inventor, the date, and the place signals the modernity of the game. Naismith responded to a challenge from Luther Gulick, head of the International Training School. Young people needed some sort of winter game that might be played indoors. Naismith experimented with various possibilities and then came up with basketball.<sup>63</sup>

His invention was an instant success. His colleague, the soon-to-be-famous Amos Alonzo Stagg, introduced the game to the University of Chicago in 1893. That same year, W. O. Black took the game to Stanford. The first intercollegiate game (Hamline College versus the Minnesota School of Agriculture) was played in February 1895. The following year, the Y.M.C.A. had a national tournament. By

1901 there was an intercollegiate league. Five years earlier, the Y.M.C.A. had introduced the game to China. By 1915, it was popular in every modern society, and in many not so modern ones.

In this period of amazingly rapid ludic diffusion, the game was continually transformed, one might even say tinkered with, with all the connotations of Eli Whitney, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford. Naismith's first teams consisted of nine men each because his physical-education class had eighteen students. Within five years, five-man teams became the norm. The pivot was allowed in 1893 and the dribble in 1896 (although the dribbler wasn't allowed to shoot from 1901 to 1908). The wild scrambles for out-of-bounds balls ended in 1913 when the present rule was introduced to bring the ball back into play. But a rule-by-rule account of the major transformations and the minor adjustments of the game is unnecessary. The point is significant but simple. The game was a conscious invention, a cultural artifact to be designed, used, redesigned. Basketball represents the triumph of ludic rationality.

The rules are, moreover, universal. The rules are now more complicated than on that marvelous December day when the inventive Mr. Naismith nailed the peachbaskets to opposite ends of the Springfield gymnasium, but these complicated rules are accepted everywhere. The rules of the Polynesian dart game are also complicated but they vary from place to place, whereas the rules of basketball are basically the same in Tashkent and Topeka.

How does the well-known superstitionness of many professional athletes relate to this pronounced emphasis on rationality? If we continue to draw examples, for the moment, from basketball, we observe that one of the game's most famous and successful coaches, UCLA's John Wooden, performed an invariant pregame ritual. Before every contest, he won the favor of the gods by turning to wink at his wife (who always attended the game and always sat behind him), by patting the knee of his assistant coach, by tugging at his socks, and by leaning over to tap the floor. No one can maintain that this ritual represents a rationalistic approach to sports, but one must note that Wooden's odd behavior did not interfere with the course of the game. Had his superstition violated the canons of rationality relevant to the game itself, had he, for instance, chosen his starting players on the

basis of their zodiacal signs, it is difficult to believe that the UCLA Bruins would have won seven straight NCAA championships.

Basketball was created as a modern sport. It is instructive to consider how hunting, which is a premodern sport, became archery, which is now thoroughly modern. Rationalization is the key. Hunting began, of course, as a utilitarian occupation. We can safely assume that cave men pursuing their prey with stones or clubs or spears thought more of their larders than of the pleasures of the chase. But hunting became a sport in Assyria and in Egypt, in China and in India, in Greece and in Rome, in every ancient civilization. It was the most popular aristocratic sport in the Middle Ages and it continues to attract followers from every class. Like bull-fighting, hunting tends to ignore the principle of equality of the conditions of competition. The lion-hunter has more prestige than the farm boy who bangs away at squirrels and lions are by no means all alike. My lion was fiercer than your lion and was shot under more dangerous circumstances. Whatever George Orwell may have said in *Animal Farm*, all animals are not equal. How shall we transform hunting into a modern sport? The answer, of course, is to create an "animal" which symbolizes the equality of all animals, i.e., a target. The target is of a standard size. It stands in one spot and it does not roar. With the target, we can rationalize hunting into archery or pistol-shooting. Rationalization is the key to the development of all sports which utilize a target. Shooting at a bull may be more satisfying than shooting at a bull's eye, but it is less modern. A similar rationalizing process has turned the cavalryman's prancing mount into the gymnast's horse.

In respect to the rationalization of the rules, Greek sports lay somewhere between primitive and modern habits. Despite the best efforts of classical scholars, we still know less than we would like about the rules of Greek and Roman sports. There is, for instance, a variety of explanations of the scoring system for the pentathlon and the leading authority on the subject has recently revised his earlier views.<sup>64</sup> There is, however, one aspect of rationalization which nicely illuminates the cultural difference between antiquity and modern society. As indicated earlier in the brief discussion of equality in the conditions of competition, Greek athletes competing directly against one

another probably used the same discus or javelin. But the standardization of equipment stopped at precisely that point. The discus hurled at Delphi in honor of Apollo was not the same size and weight as that flung at Athens in honor of the goddess. In fact, the diameters of discuses which have come down to us vary from 5.5 inches to 13.5 inches and the weights from 3 to 15 pounds. The stade race was standard at athletic festivals, but the "stade" was not an invariant length. We know that a 400-meter track in Montreal is—within a few centimeters—the same length as one in Munich or Moscow, but the Greek stade varied from festival to festival. At Olympia, the stade was 192.27 meters, at Delphi 177.5 meters, at Epidaurus 181.3 meters, and at Pergamon 210 meters. The Greeks, and certainly the Romans, were technologically sophisticated enough to have standardized these distances, but they chose not to.

The Greeks did rationalize sports in another way. They seem to have been the first people more or less scientifically to study the techniques of athletic events and to explore the physiological basis of achievement. Other peoples produced manuals and accumulated lore, but the Greeks generated a whole branch of science, now mostly lost, that parallels our own production of manuals, guides, and scholarly papers in sports medicine and sports psychology. A comment by Aristotle is especially revealing: "We argue about the navigation of ships more than about the training of athletes, because [navigation] has been less well organized as a science."<sup>65</sup>

Although the boys' games of primitive peoples include physical activities which prepare them for the adult roles of hunter and warrior, primitive adults do not seem to practice in order to improve their hunting skills. The Ifugao of the Philippine Islands "thinks he hits or misses according to the will of his gods and the forces of magic. From the time he was a boy, he does not practice his spear-throwing, makes no effort even to keep in form. Almost all the practice he gets, his whole life long, is from the throwing" in boyhood and youth.<sup>66</sup> The Greeks did more than practice. They trained. The distinction is important. Training implies a rationalization of the whole enterprise, a willingness to experiment, a constant testing of results achieved. For the athlete, there was a special diet with much more meat than was customary. There was the tetrad or four-day cycle of preparation,



concentration, relaxation, moderation (i.e., easy exercises, strenuous effort, recovery, technical exercises). There was a whole way of life concentrated on the single goal of athletic excellence.

We have taken what they initiated and have, in our usual way, gone to what sometimes seems like an extreme. The scientific study of physiology and psychology in the university provides us with technical information to be utilized by coaches and trainers. In the United States, the relationship between scientific research and actual *praxis* is relatively informal. The results of laboratory investigation are published in monographs or in special journals like the *Research Quarterly* where the information is available for those who wish to apply it. For decades coaches ignored scientific studies which demonstrated that weight-training did not render athletes "muscle-bound." Today, however, coaches who seek to "keep up" lecture ten-year-old hockey players on the relative merits of aerobic and anaerobic exercises. In Germany and in Eastern Europe generally, the scientific study of sports is rationalized to an even greater extent than in America. There are special institutes to carry on research and the application of scientific discoveries to training schedules and to athletic events is much quicker than here. One reason for the astonishing success of East Germany at the 1976 Olympics was that physiological research is taken more seriously than in the United States. Their *Sportwissenschaftler* are able to identify prospective champions, to isolate them for intensive training, and to prepare them psychologically for the moment of competition. Kornelia Ender's potential as a champion swimmer, for instance, was first discovered by means of a blood test. There has been a reaction against the ruthlessly rationalized training of athletes, who have been described by some as "robots," but there is an unquestionable line of development here which extends from the first manuals of ancient Greece through Renaissance books on the art of fencing to the complex facilities of Leipzig, Prague, Warsaw, and Moscow. West Germany's efforts rival those of the Communist countries, and the United States will almost inevitably strive to close this new "gap." It is highly unlikely that the tendency toward increased rationalization will be halted by the protests of men and women who cherish the day when sports were avocations.

## 5. BUREAUCRATIZATION

Who in actual practice decides the rules of modern sports and who administers the complicated system of research? The answer is obvious. A bureaucratic organization. Once again, we need but to remind ourselves of Max Weber's analysis of the distinctions between a primitive hierarchy of prescribed behavior and a modern bureaucracy of functional roles. We can be sure that the rules of primitive sports changed slowly and that the changes were probably introduced by ritual adepts. Sportswriters today may refer to the heads of the National Football League or the National Collegiate Athletic Association or the Fédération Internationale de Natation as the "high priests" of sports, but the insult is metaphorical. Alvin "Pete" Rozelle, Willi Daume, and even Lord Killarin of the International Olympic Committee are elected administrators of extensive bureaucratic organizations. One of their many functions is to see that the rules of the game really are universal.

Needless to say, primitive societies are not characterized by bureaucratic organizations of any kind, let alone a sports bureaucracy. Once again, we can turn to the Greeks for intimations of the modern. Prolific as they were of institutional forms, they may be said to have had a nascent form of sports bureaucracy. The Athenians and others with democratic tendencies elected officials or selected them by lot. Each Greek city had its *gymnasiarch* or ruler of the *gymnasium*. Athletic competitions were usually administered by an *agonothete*. How much of the administration remained in priestly as opposed to secular hands is hard to say. What is certain is that the germs of sport bureaucracy flowered in Roman times. The most famous administrator was Herodes Atticus, whom the emperor Hadrian appointed as *athlothete*, who endowed the great stadium in Athens.<sup>67</sup> It was, incidentally, this stadium which the Greeks renovated in order to stage the first of the modern Olympic games in 1896.

The most remarkable form of Roman sports bureaucracy was the guild or *xystos* (note the frequency of Greek terms) of athletes, an organization imperial in scope, with elected leadership, detailed rules and regulations, entrance requirements, codes of proper conduct,

and even the material paraphernalia—like membership certificates—that we associate with modern sports administration.

The absence of bureaucratic organization among primitive peoples and its presence among the Romans should astonish no one, but the ubiquity of such administrative forms in every modern society ought to give one more pause than it generally does. As in many areas, England led the way. The Marylebone Cricket Club, founded in 1787, gradually became the ultimate authority in all matters pertaining to cricket. By the early nineteenth century, the MCC had successfully standardized the game, with precise regulations for the weight of the ball, the width of the bat, the distance between wickets, the dimensions of the wicket, etc.

Except for anomalies like baseball and American football, every major modern sport has its international organization which, in turn, supervises dozens of national affiliates. The first of these was the Union Internationale de Courses de Yacht (1875). By 1959, there were seventy-three such organizations, the strongest of which, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) had, in 1964, 126 national organizations as members.<sup>68</sup> The international federations cooperate closely with the International Olympic Committee and the various national Olympic committees. There are, of course, numerous occasions for jurisdictional squabbles and ugly confrontations as well, but the point is that there is an intricate bureaucratic web covering the globe.

The first national sports organizations were born in the middle of the nineteenth century, in England. By the end of the century, international organizations proliferated, and the International Olympic Committee had been born (in 1894). In the twentieth century, almost every modern nation has created a governmental sports bureaucracy to aid, abet, regulate, or replace the voluntary associations of the nineteenth century. Even Czarist Russia had its Office of the General Supervisor for the Physical Development of the Peoples of Russia.<sup>69</sup> Here, the United States is once again exceptional in that we have no Minister of Sports, nor, it must be added, are our amateur athletes governed by a single voluntary association. It is, however, all but certain that a single governing authority, private or

public, will soon emerge. The recent report of the Presidential Commission on Olympic Sports (1977) is a step in that direction.

One of the most important functions of the bureaucracy is to see that the rules and regulations are universal. Another is to facilitate a network of competitions that usually progress from local contests through national to world championships. Of more immediate interest is still another function of sports associations, namely, the ratification of records. The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) was founded in 1913 and began in the very next year to publish its official list of world records.<sup>70</sup> But the very concept of a record, which is the last and most uniquely modern characteristic of modern sports, depends upon the penultimate characteristic—quantification.

## 6. QUANTIFICATION

There can hardly be an American, a Frenchman, or a Japanese who did not, as a child, while playing alone, count the numbers of consecutive times that he or she tossed a ball into the air and caught it again. If one can throw, one can count. One *must* count. It is a childish game that is far more typical of modern than of primitive society, where quantification is not a *modus vivendi*. Nimrod was a mighty hunter of Biblical times, but it is typical of our world that Rowland Ward's *Records of Big Game* (1892) is referred to as "Nimrod's slide-rule."<sup>71</sup>

We need not exaggerate. The Polynesians of Tikopia scored their dart game with a complicated system and similar systems existed for calculating points in many ancient ball games, but modern sports are characterized by the almost inevitable tendency to transform every athletic feat into one that can be quantified and measured. The accumulation of statistics on every conceivable aspect of the game is a hallmark of football, baseball, basketball, hockey, and of track and field sports too, where the accuracy of quantification has, thanks to an increasingly precise technology, reached a degree that makes the stopwatch seem positively primitive. (The stopwatch itself is often

taken as a symbol for the development of modern sports. It was invented ca. 1730 as an instrument to time races.) Electronic times measure in hundredths and even thousandths of a second and these differences are perceived by the spectators and by the athletes themselves as intensely significant. Was it merely an accident that the founder of the International Amateur Athletic Federation—Sigfrid Edstrom—was an engineer?

Newspapers publish daily statistics on the most popular team sports—baseball, football, basketball, and hockey in the United States, soccer in most other modern societies. The quantified results of golf and tennis matches are usually given coverage in newspapers. Sports such as track and field, gymnastics, and weightlifting have their specialized journals which print column after column of statistical information. In East Germany, perhaps the most bureaucratized and quantified of all countries, the government publishes an annual *DDR-Bestienliste der Kleinsten*, which gives the year's best athletic achievements for children in the first four years of elementary school.<sup>72</sup> Most sports also have their encyclopedias. At least one theorist suggests that sport be defined as that physical activity which can be measured in points or in the c-g-s system (centimeter-gram-second).<sup>73</sup>

The statistics of the game are part and parcel of the statistics of modern society. The Earned Run Average and the Gross National Product, Yards Gained Rushing and the Grade Point Average. We live in a world of numbers. Computers inform us of the successful batter's new average before he arrives breathlessly at second base, just as computers provide us with data on the Dow-Jones Average and the felony rate in twenty-five metropolitan areas. When the tabulation of gold, silver, and bronze medals seems inadequate for comparisons among nations at the Olympic games, the dedicated statistician quickly derives a logarithmic formula:  $P = 100(1 - \log x / \log n)$ , where  $P$  = the number of points,  $x$  = the placement of the athlete or team, and  $n$  = the number of contestants in the event.<sup>74</sup> First place receives 100 points (because the log of one is zero) and last place receives no points (because  $\log n / \log n$  is one), while fourth place out of five contestants earns 13.86 points and the more impressive showing of fourth out of fifty reaps 64.56 points. The physiologist who devised this sys-

tem has also invented tables of equivalence which compare incomparables like the highjump and the discus throw—an extension on his part of the idea behind the point system of the decathlon. It is his assertion that Bob Beamon's fantastic longjump of 8.90 meters (29 feet) is the equivalent of a mile run of 3:43.3 seconds.<sup>75</sup> We live in a world of numbers.

The Greeks did not. Pythagoras, Archimedes, Euclid, and others made great contributions to mathematics, especially to geometry, but Greek civilization was not obsessed with the need to quantify. For them, man was still the measure of all things, not the object of endless measurements. To wear the victor's leafy crown, to be the best of those who had on that cloudless day contested for glory and fame at Olympia or Corinth—that was sufficient. How far was the discus thrown? How fast did the runner traverse the distance? No one knows. In all the literary remains of Hellenism there are only scattered epigrams which give us the numbers. It is said that Phyllus of Croton jumped 16 meters (55 feet) and threw the discus 29 meters (95 feet). The second achievement is unimpressive, the first is impossible. The epigram was probably satirical, but modern searches for a plausible explanation for that jump led to the invention of the triple jump, an event of very doubtful authenticity.<sup>76</sup>

Why don't we know how fast the runner ran? We are tempted to respond that the Greeks lacked accurate chronometers. This may be the correct answer, but I suspect that it may have been the other way around—the Greeks had no accurate chronometers because they didn't care how fast the runner ran. Why don't we know how far they jumped or threw the javelin? We certainly cannot respond in this instance that the Greeks lacked the means of measurement. Their technology was more than adequate for them to have marked off a rope and used it to ascertain the distance. The significant point is that they simply didn't care. Whether or not the victor of one Olympiad sent his javelin farther than the one thrown four years earlier seems to have been a matter of indifference. Similarly, the winner of the discus throw at the Panathenaic festival may or may not have outdistanced the winner at Nemea or Pergamon. We shall never know. No wonder then that discuses varied in size and weight. Comparability beyond the circle of athletes gathered together for the event was never

sought and quantification of the results was unnecessary. The closest approach to our modern sense of quantification was in the numeration of achievements. Just as Herakles performed ten labors, Milo of Croton was famed for five victories at Olympia, six at the Pythian games, ten at the Isthmian games, and nine at Nemea.

It was this characteristic—the numeration of achievements—which the Romans seized upon and developed *almost* in the spirit of modern sports. The Romans do not seem to have attempted to quantify Greek sports, for which they had little enthusiasm anyway. There was, understandably, little reason to quantify a gladiatorial combat, but the chariot races of Rome and Constantinople were another matter. The races were not, to the best of our knowledge, timed. We have as little idea of the winner's speed as we do of a Greek runner's swiftness, but the Romans became fascinated with counting the number of first places, second places, first places won from behind, etc. There is, for instance, an inscription to Gaius Appuleius Diocles, whose career began in 122 A.D. In four-horse chariot races, he started 4,257 times, won 1,462 times, came in second 861 times, and third 576 times. But our sources are too few and uncertain to sustain the kind of assertions that we can make about modern sports. Does *occupavit et vicit* mean to have taken the lead and kept it to victory? We cannot be sure.<sup>77</sup> There was a second kind of quantification which began under the Greeks and continued into Roman times. Professional athletes frequently boasted that they were the first to have won seven victories at seven different festivals or three times in a row at this or that famous site. It is still a long way from this type of scoring to the lengthy statistical appendices with which modern biographies terminate, but the first steps were taken. We celebrate our Olympics and imagine ourselves the heirs of ancient Hellas, but we are probably closer in this as in other matters to the howling crowds of "Blues" and "Greens" that cheered on the charioteers of Constantinople.

When the Olympics were revived in 1896, an American observer noted that gymnastics were not especially popular because they were not "real" athletic contests amenable to precise measurement.<sup>78</sup> He underestimated the urge to quantify which characterizes our society. In our cultural universe, even those contests which resist quantifica-

tion are modified to bring them into conformity with the dominant mode. It is easy enough to mark off the length of a track or of a swimming pool into the appropriate metric distance and to time the runners or the swimmers electronically, but how can one rationalize and quantify a competition in gymnastics, in aesthetics? The answer now seems obvious. Set up an interval scale and a panel of judges and then take the arithmetic mean of their subjective evaluations (excluding the highest and lowest scores). Nadia Comaneci scored exactly 79.275 points in Montreal, neither more nor less. The ingenuity of *Homo mensor* must not be underestimated.

## 7. RECORDS

Combine the impulse to quantification with the desire to win, to excel, to be the best—and the result is the concept of the record. Primitive sports are not entirely devoid of the instinct to identify the unsurpassed. Our T'ikopian dart throwers set down a stone to mark a cast mightier than the rest, and other tribes have commemorated fabulous achievements—which may indeed have been the progeny of fable rather than of measurement. Archery seems to have been among the first sports for which records were set. A Turkish inscription from the thirteenth century praises Sultan Mahmud Khan for a shot of 1,215 arrow-lengths and a seventeenth-century miniature portrays archers on Istanbul's *Okmeidan* ("Place of Arrows"), where shots of astounding length were recorded.<sup>79</sup> Among the Japanese, records for the number of arrows shot under various stringent conditions were set at least as early as the seventeenth century.<sup>80</sup> But the modern record is the child of the modern mania for quantification. The Greeks had no concept of records in our sense of the term. According to the classicists M. I. Finley and H. W. Pleket, there was not even a way for the Greeks to say "to set a record" or "to break a record"; the noun "record" made the verb "record" (an abbreviation as in "fastest recorded time") dates from the 1880s.<sup>81</sup>

What is a record in our modern sense? It is the marvelous abstraction that permits competition not only among those gathered together on the field of sport but also among them and others distant in time

and space. Through the strange abstraction of the quantified record, the Australian can compete with the Finn who died a decade before the Australian was born. The record becomes a psychological presence in the mind of everyone involved with the event, as it was at Iffley Road Track in 1954 when Roger Bannister ran the first four-minute mile. The record is a number in the "record book" and in the upper-right-hand corner of the television screen, it is a stimulus to unimagined heights of achievement and a psychic barrier which thwarts our efforts, it is an occasion for frenzy, a form of rationalized madness, a symbol of our civilization. In a lyrical moment, a French athlete of the 1920s hoped that his daughter would "one day recite the litany not of our battles but of our records, more beautiful than the labors of Hercules."<sup>82</sup>

The mass media of the United States worked themselves into a lather of profitable ecstasy as Henry Aaron gradually approached and finally surpassed Babe Ruth's lifetime record of 714 home runs. *Pravda* shows the same perspective. In an editorial of August 6, 1950, it was said, "Many sport records set up several years ago have not yet been surpassed. It is the task of our young athletes to break these records and establish new, incomparably better ones."<sup>83</sup> Five years earlier, *Pravda* had announced cash payments of 25,000 rubles to "amateur" athletes who set new world records.<sup>84</sup> The results of such encouragement can be seen in the gradual domination of the Olympic games by athletes from the Soviet Union and the other Communist nations.

We have already observed that the quantification of the aesthetic makes possible scores for figure skaters and divers and gymnasts. The fact of quantification generates the quest for records even in these ballet-like sports. A score of ten in Olympic competition represented, at the moment when Nadia Comaneci approached the uneven parallel bars in Montreal, a hitherto unrecorded and unanticipated "perfection." Seven times she achieved "perfection" and *that*, the magical number seven, becomes a record which surpasses Nelli Kim's attainment of the same score only once. We marvel at Nadia Comaneci's achievement and assume in the innocence of our quantification that her movements were a finer aesthetic-athletic performance than Ludmilla Tourescheva's in 1972. Was not Nadia's total

of 79.275 better than Ludmilla's 77.025? We know that John Walker has run a mile faster than any human ever recognized by the International Amateur Athletic Federation. Because a record is a record, we think we know that Nadia's brilliant performance was the best ever. The Mayans and Aztecs had their superstitions, we have ours.

What will happen to our obsessive quest for records when athletes finally do begin to reach, as eventually they must, the limits of human possibility? What will happen when there is no Kornelia Ender or Dwight Stones to sate the public's orgasmic demand for world records? Toward the end of his remarkable book, *De la Gymnastique aux sports modernes* (1965), Jacques Ullmann contrasts the spirit of Greek sports with that of the modern world: "Greek gymnastics was inseparable from a conception of the body which was itself conditioned by a metaphysics of finitude. The sport of modern man is associated with a philosophy, sometimes diffuse, sometimes coherent, i.e., the theory of progress."<sup>85</sup> The "Idea of Progress" is an idea whose history the scholar J. B. Bury was able to trace back to the eighteenth century, an idea which became dominant in the minds of nineteenth-century thinkers. The theory or idea of progress is a linear concept which assumes that every improvement can be improved upon. Johnny Weissmuller astonished the world in 1924 when he swam 400 meters in 5:04.2 seconds. Today, his winning time would not earn him a place in the women's finals. We expect that the present women's record for 100 meters freestyle will drop from the 55.65 seconds set by Kornelia Ender, but it is humanly impossible for the record to drop to 30 seconds. Somewhere in that interval it must come to rest. What will happen when it does?

Perhaps an example from the history of Japanese sports will be instructive. In the ancient religious center of Kyoto there is a temple, Sanju-Sangen-Do, which is surrounded by a gallery. Between the eaves of the temple and those of the gallery there is an aperture of 4.54 meters. In the seventeenth century, a contest was inaugurated—"Oyakazu." The point of Oyakazu was to see how many arrows an archer could shoot through this aperture, without touching the gallery, in a period of twenty-four hours. The contest dates from 1606 and was still known in 1842, but interest dropped off drastically after April 16, 1686, when a certain Daichachiro Wasa scored 8,132

successes with 13,053 arrows. A modern Japanese historian comments, "As people found it difficult to break the record, the Oyakazu gradually went out of vogue."<sup>86</sup> It may be, of course, that the modern historian's interpretation is anachronistic—after all, the activity continued for another 156 years—but the *interpretation* is in itself highly suggestive of the extraordinary place that the concept of the record holds in our modern world. What will happen when athletic championships no longer yield their harvests of new records, when every sport has its Daichachiro Wasar? Will we accept sports in the Greek sense, content with the dramatic contest of man against man (or woman against woman), or will we imagine new ways to satisfy the Faustian lust for the absolutely unprecedented athletic achievement? We must, with uncharacteristic patience, wait and see.

## 8. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN SPORTS

The seven distinguishing characteristics of modern sports have been discussed. The uniqueness of modern sports can now be summed upon in typically modern tabular form (table 2). These characteristics are not simply a random set selected impressionistically or on an *ad-hoc* basis. When we look back from the last of them, from the quest for records, we can see that they are interrelated. They interact systematically. We might even invent a (false) teleology and assert that, in order to achieve records, the other characteristics were necessary.

Table 2  
The Characteristics of Sports in Various Ages

	Primitive Sports	Greek Sports	Roman Sports	Medieval Sports	Modern Sports
Secularism	Yes & No	Yes & No	Yes & No	Yes & No	Yes
Equality	No	Yes & No	Yes & No	No	Yes
Specialization	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Rationalization	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Bureaucracy	No	Yes & No	Yes	No	Yes
Quantification	No	No	Yes & No	No	Yes
Records	No	No	No	No	Yes

The modern quest for records is certainly unthinkable in its present form without quantification. It is also impossible, after a certain point reached by the untrained body, to achieve new records without specialization and rationalization. But specialization and rationalization usually imply bureaucratic organization, without which world championships cannot be staged nor rules established nor records duly certified. The spectacular achievements of Montreal and Innsbruck were the culmination of years of effort by thousands of people. The specialization, rationalization, and bureaucratization of modern sport also assume certain kinds of equality of opportunity. The quest for records would be farcical if the fastest runner or the most skillful fencer were barred from competition because of occupation or skin color or religion. Finally, the very notion of quantified achievement is probably more compatible with the standards of a secular system than with one closely oriented to the transcendent realm of the sacred. This is a difficult notion to grasp and perhaps even an unpalatable one, but it may be that the dynamics of athletic achievement commence with the secularization of society. When qualitative distinctions fade and lose their force, we turn to quantitative ones. When we can no longer distinguish the sacred from the profane or even the good from the bad, we content ourselves with minute discriminations between the batting average of the .308 hitter and the .307 hitter. Once the gods have vanished from Mount Olympus or from Dante's paradise, we can no longer run to appease them or to save our souls, but we can set a new record. It is a uniquely modern form of immortality.