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The Material Culture of Sport: Toward a Typology

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Material objects, declared art historian Jules Prown, offer insights into “the beliefs—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time.” In this article we apply Prown’s assertion to an examination of the material objects of sport, which we categorize into a nine-fold typology: playing equipment, venues, training equipment and sport medicine technology, sportswear, prizes, symbolic artifacts, performance measurement technology, ephemera/detritus, and memorabilia. However, in arguing that material objects provide a vehicle for understanding sporting practices and beliefs, we emphasize continuity over change, specifically in six core systems—agon, craft, gambling, community, eros, and framing. We suggest that analysis of material culture shines a light on the meaning of sport as bright as that emanating from archives or deep theory.

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BILL VEECK, JR.—PERHAPS THE MOST IMAGINATIVE MAGNATE in the history of American sport—understood the importance of material conditions. When he owned baseball's AAA Milwaukee Brewers in the 1940s, the team had no speed and no power. Slowing down the opposition was easy, Veeck recalled in his memoirs. He instructed his grounds crew to add a "loose, sandy mixture" onto the base paths—"in the interests of closer competition." Soon, all the runners plodded "like kids . . . on the beach." Fair's fair, he claimed: "If we couldn't run, nobody ran."¹

But what to do about hitting, especially when his ballpark had a short right field (265 feet), his team had no left-handed power, and his opponents licked their chops whenever they came to town? The immediate answer was simple, he later claimed: extend the fence upward with chicken wire and turn "all those short home runs into long singles."² Nothing unusual so far. American baseball is noted for the quirky dimensions of its major league fields (e.g., the 37-foot high left field fence in Boston's Fenway Park, affectionately known as the "Green Monster"). The ever-progressive Veeck, however, did not cease his engineering there. The following season, after acquiring some left-handed power hitters, he allegedly devised a hydraulic system for rolling the chicken wire onto or off the fence. "When the visiting team had more left-handed power than we did," he explained, "the fence would stay up. Otherwise, we would reel it back into the foul line." Oddly enough, no rules prohibited such alterations from game to game! Veeck would fashion similar fence follies after he bought the Cleveland Indians and negotiated the mammoth dimensions of Municipal Stadium.³

Many of Bill Veeck's recollections have proven unverifiable via newspaper accounts; and no one has found the remains of Veeck's retractable Milwaukee fence. Nonetheless the object, in either fact or fancy, immerses us in the world of sport and introduces us to key components of its practice, which include competition, sportsmanship, boundaries, performance, and rules. This article explores such elements—which we argue have endured over time—by examining the codes of meaning that are variously stamped onto or into material objects such as Veeck's fence. In the words of art historian Jules Prown, material objects help us to "discover the beliefs—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time." In many respects, Veeck's fence brings the baseball world to light better than any bundle of league constitutions, player profiles, or stat sheets.⁴

The material world of sport is vast in its history and its scope, from ancient Greek *strigils* to the ubiquitous ball cap of today. As Prown suggests, each object is conditioned by a special historical context, including structures of social class, gender, race, or ethnicity.⁵ At the same time, material culture can develop, represent, reinforce, or alter systems of sport values. In examining material culture, we focus on how "things" have shaped practices and beliefs over long waves of historical time. To quote anthropologist Mary Douglas, material goods build up "the structure of culture like coral islands"—in sport or in any other domain of human experience.⁶ One cannot hope to understand game rules, league dynamics, or heroic performances without embracing the objects below the rhetorical surface. Veeck's fence, for instance, led to changes in the rules that solidified the prevailing sense of sportsmanship or competition in the 1940s. Likewise, the success of "klap" skates in the 1998 Nagano Olympic speed skating ruptured traditions of style and

performance, leading to debates about who were, are, or would be the “best” skaters of all time. At that time, International Skating Union (ISU) President Ottavio Cinquanta announced that his federation would separate the records earned with klap skates from those won with “normal” skates. A decade later, Speedo’s record-breaking LZR Racer swimsuit helped swimmers quickly break thirty-seven world records, prompting Italian coach Alberto Castagnetti to call the innovation nothing more than “technological doping.”⁷ The rule-makers of skating and swimming may one day set boundaries on innovation, just like those in golf, motor racing, tennis and other sports. In any case, the skates and swimsuits, like Veeck’s fence, open their “readers” to a variety of cultural meanings.

Historians typically analyze such meanings within the bounds of particular cultures and context. In this article we propose a set of more universal and enduring categories. The matter of universals versus particulars has been a philosophical problem since its early discussion by pre-Socratic philosophers in ancient Greece and in modern times it has been an issue among social scientists. As historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein observed three decades ago:

The social sciences of the nineteenth and twentieth century have been the locus of a debate between the universalizers and the particularizers, between those who sought to discover the general rules of social behavior, and those who sought to delineate the particular and peculiar ways in which each unit developed. Most of the universalizers have called themselves economists or sociologists or political scientists. Most of the particularizers have called themselves historians or ethnographers.⁸

It is fair to say that most sport historians, like historians in general, are particularizers; some have articulated extensive interpretations of sport in cultures both ancient and modern, but most typically focus on the specificity of meaning for people bound by time and place.⁹

Our earlier reference to “waves of historical time” is not meant to deny the specificity of meaning among people bound by time and place. As Thomas Scanlon has argued in his magisterial *Eros and Greek Athletics* (2002), it is “misleading” to suggest that “similar activities have essentially the same function since they recur in various societies over time and can be traced diachronically.” We agree with Scanlon’s important caution. Shrove Tuesday football in sixteenth-century Derby was distinctly different from today’s FA Cup final in Wembley; the *ali’i* (hereditary, chiefly class) surfers of pre-modern Hawai’i viewed surfing through a different set of ritualistic lens than modern surfers living on the North Shore of O’ahu.¹⁰

We also agree with the warning from historian Donald Kyle that “we should be wary of anachronistic ideological agendas, of unconsciously imposing modern concerns, issues, and biases on the distant and defenseless past.” At the same time, however, we believe there is a value in identifying broad *categories* of thought, behavior, and meaning in sports that appear to cross temporal or spatial boundaries. We refer to these as “long residuals.”¹¹ We borrow the term from two sources. The first is Fernand Braudel – leading light of the French Annales School of history, who defined the “longue durée,” as “the old habits of thinking and acting, the set patterns which do not break down easily and which, however illogical, are a long time dying.”¹² The second is Raymond Williams—British cultural critic—who considered experiences, meanings, and values as “residual” if they were “lived

and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation . . . formed in the past but . . . still active in the cultural process.”¹³

At least in the Western world of sports, six long residuals stand out:

Agon - the core contest between opposing individuals and/or teams.

Craft - the skills, practices, and technologies required to achieve at the *agon*.

Community - the ways in which both athletes and spectators create bonds and bridges that simultaneously link and separate groups through shared sporting passions.

Gambling - the wagering on the outcome of the *agon*, which drives much of the passion surrounding sport.

Eros - the sexual attraction of agonal bodies.

Framing - the tendency to surround the *agon* with frames of spectacle and festival, each of which contains elements of the other residual practices.

These six systems of practice and belief have extended through time and space by means of endless repetitions of performance. One can see their manifestations in events such as the annual Oxford and Cambridge boat race (1829), the Kentucky Derby (1875), tennis at Wimbledon (1877), the Tour de France (1903), or the World Cup (1931). In varying degree, they are also evident in pickup, sandlot ball games, or in made-for-television events like the X-Games and Slam Ball. To a great extent, sports are enduring rituals. While their boundaries have been constantly pressed at the margins, while their specific meanings have varied with time and place, these broad patterns of sporting *agon*, craft, community, gambling, *eros*, and framing may help us to understand better why sports have such wide and abiding appeal.¹⁴

Much of this history is contained in the material culture of sport; that is, the artifacts of the arena, the field, and the court. No classification scheme can completely capture the vast material world of sport, but we offer the following typology:

Playing Equipment (e.g. balls, clubs, racquets).

Venues (e.g. arenas, courts, fields, pools, rings, rinks, tracks).

Training Equipment and Sport Medicine Technology (e.g. treadmills, weight-lifting machines, heart rate monitors).

Sportswear (worn by players, coaches, band members, cheerleaders, fans).

Prizes (e.g. certificates, medals, ribbons, trophies).

Symbolic Artifacts (e.g. colors, flags, mascots, pennants).

Performance Measurement Technology (e.g. stop watches, laser beams).

Ephemera and Detritus (e.g. discarded ticket stubs, betting slips).

Memorabilia (collections of any of the above).

These are not exclusive categories. For example, bodily specimens, such as urine, blood, and DNA, may be listed under the headings of sport medicine technology or performance measurement technology depending on the specific context. We also note the existence of more scholarly forms of material culture related to sport, such as books, films, recorded broadcasts and telecasts, and newspapers and magazines.

In this article we focus on forms of material culture that have had particularly strong associations with a particular long residual: prizes (*agon*), equipment (craft), colors (community), ephemera/detritus (gambling), sportswear (*eros*), and venues (framing). Our examples include the activities of people in roles that we label today with terms such as

player, spectator, manager, coach, manufacturer, and promoter. Marketing theory suggests that all such roles participate in the creation of the sport experience.¹⁵

Prizes and *Agon*

Among the ancient Greeks, *agon* was bound to notions of the heroic career. As British classicist C.M. Bowra put it, “The essence of the heroic outlook is *the pursuit of honor through action*.”¹⁶ By “action” Bowra had in mind the contests and struggles of physical prowess among peers—what the ancient Greeks called *agones*. Other heroic cultures (e.g., medieval European knights-errant and nineteenth-century American Plains Indians) reflected this ethos, which Morford and Clark called *The Agon Motif*, denoting “the agon or spirit of rivalry and self assertion in the quest for personal fame.”¹⁷

It is no surprise that sporting contests helped to define such cultures. The *agon*, or contest, lies at the heart of all sports, which at their core involve individual demonstrations of physical prowess via speed, strength, stamina, accuracy, and coordination. But winning such contests has seldom been enough. Marks of honor have been part and parcel of the *agon*. In fact, sporting prizes in the forms of trophies, shields, and medals have been perhaps the most visible form of material culture in sport.

Among the first glimpses of this link between *agon* and prize is Homer’s account of the funeral games for Patroclus. To honor his friend, Achilles ensures that every contest—chariot race, boxing, wrestling, footrace, among others—offers worthy prizes. In fact, the segue from funeral to games is a procession of prizes, during which Achilles holds the Greeks near the funeral pyre:

He had them sit in a great and growing circle—now for funeral games—and brought from his ships the trophies for the contests: cauldrons and tripods, stallions, mules and cattle with massive heads, women sashed and lovely, and gleaming gray iron.¹⁸

Our modern sensitivities may lead us to recoil at some of the prizes, yet we can easily recognize the burning desire to win them. When Menelaus accuses Antilochus of cheating his way to second place in the chariot race (by cutting off Menelaus at a turn), much of the tension and resolution revolves around not just the desire to win, but the honor of gaining a prize. Stung by Menelaus’s verbal attack, Antilochus quickly comes to his senses and begs forgiveness, admitting that his youthful passion clouded his judgment and caused him to break the rules. But oral apology is not enough; it is all about the prize. Antilochus offers Menelaus not only the mare awarded for second place; he adds “any finer trophy you’d ask from my own stores.” In his own gesture of regal honor, Menelaus accepts the apology and allows Antilochus to keep the mare, “though she is mine,” he notes, “so our people here will know the heart inside me is never rigid, unrelenting.”¹⁹

These passages, among the very first to describe sport in the Western tradition, reveal there is nothing without the prize. It is a reality that has echoed across the centuries. While the America’s Cup is commonly considered the “oldest active trophy in international sport,” the qualifiers “active” and “international” beg for greater clarification. In fact, the historical record, from Homer onward, regularly links sports competition to some sort of prize. As the Greeks organized games at Olympia, Delphi, Athens, and poleis around their world, they offered a range of prizes—from symbolic olive crowns to sumptuous silver coins.

Since that time, the physical nature of sporting prizes may have varied, their notoriety and their legacy may have differed, but their centrality seems quite consistent.²⁰

It is difficult to think of an institution that makes more of symbolic certificates, medals, plates, ribbons, and trophies. Perhaps there is an inverse relationship between the importance of prizes and the distance between sport skills and the mainstream work world. Sociologist William Goode argued that symbolic awards are proof that athletes have achieved a certain level of performance; they indicate their performances are worthy of respect.²¹ In this sense symbolic rewards enhance the social identity of both individuals and groups, and greatly influence the future careers of those who receive them. For instance, New Zealand's All Blacks have consistently topped the International Rugby Board's World Rankings over the last two decades but have failed to win the quadrennial Rugby World Cup in this period, much to the consternation of New Zealanders who have repeatedly directed invective at the players and coaches for failing to secure *the* William Webb Ellis.



The Hobey Baker Trophy is emblematic of the sporting *agon's* heroic code. COURTESY OF STEPHEN HARDY.

The quest for rewards and respect also has a dark side that manifests in bribery, cheating, chicanery, corruption, deceit, and scandal. Much of sport history concerns this dark side, which has a close association with each of our historical continuities as well as different forms of sporting materialism. For instance, the Olympic games in ancient Greece produced classic examples of corruption, including the first recorded scandal of note. In 388 B.C., the boxer Eubulus of Thessaly bribed three opponents to throw their fights. Olympic judges levied fines against an athlete's city if he was caught in the act of corruption; the fines were used to erect bronze statues of Zeus—"known as Zanes, which were inscribed with moral poems . . . 'to show that you win at Olympia with the speed of your feet and the strength of your body, not with money.'"²² Officials erected some sixteen Zanes at Olympia. Collectively they constituted the first "Hall of Shame"; they offer an ancient example of material culture related to corruption in sport. Since ancient times, fixing boxing matches and horse races has been a perennial sporting concern. No sport has been immune in modern times, with history recording numerous examples of fixed baseball and basketball games and, more recently, cricket and professional tennis matches.

For better and for worse, sporting prizes have solidified the *agon's* centrality to the sport experience. They have also had enormous effects on notions of local, regional, and national identity: and yet, they have been largely understudied. Historical discussions of prizes and trophies often sit only as marginal testimony to heroic performance. They deserve more thoughtful attention. Such material objects have, for instance, helped to build, challenge, and/or reinforce political regimes and racial codes. As one scholar has recently argued, "Sports historians need to consider how they treat sporting heroes and the creation of narratives around those heroes, but they also need to understand the impact of acts of commemoration that produce items of material culture in the form of sporting prizes."²³ The topic awaits some gold medal efforts.

Equipment and Craft

Many contemporary studies have found that acquiring skill and knowledge are among the basic attractions of any sport.²⁴ Mastery of the body's potential keeps us interested at all levels— whether playing or watching. In the words of the cultural critic and cricket lover C.L.R. James, humans respond to sports performances because they rehearse fundamental movements that are at the heart of human craft: ". . . the use of the hand, the extension of its power by the tool, the propulsion of a missile at some objective, and the accompanying refinements of the mechanics of judgment." In James's opinion, these movements "marked us off from the animals."²⁵ Few fans ever consider James's "deep" motivations when they marvel at Cristiano Ronaldo striking a perfect volley in a Champions League match or Venus Williams wielding her racquet with exquisite skill. And yet there is something in James beyond a metaphysics of sport. How else can we justify the adoration (never mind the salaries) that fans, media, sponsors, and owners heap on what, in any rational sense, are hopelessly unproductive skills that bear little relation to survival in a highly technological world? Professional hockey player Eric Nesterenko recognized the source of this attraction to fans: "Being a physical man in the modern world is becoming obsolete. The machines have taken the place of that."²⁶

If James and Nesterenko are correct, then sports are attractive precisely because they provide a chance to experience a side of our humanity that might easily atrophy without

balls, bats, hoops, nets, and sticks of all shapes and sizes. Material culture is central to this. Material objects enable the craft in sports by defining, limiting, and even creating the movements of particular games. While the ancient Greeks competed without equipment or apparel in running and wrestling, they were and are exceptions. Michael Jordan and Pele wielded no magic without a ball (or, in Jordan's case, without his Air Jordans).

Artisans of leather, wood, or metal crafted early sports equipment to order. Their artistic legacy may be found in the custom-made racing bicycles of the Tour de France or the exquisite over-under shotguns of Olympic trapshooting. The sporting goods industry of mass production developed in the late nineteenth century, led by the Nike of its day, A.G. Spalding & Bros. Manufacturers like the Spaldings wanted to make equipment available to a range of skills and pocketbooks. They also wanted consumers to believe that "real" sports demanded authentic equipment, made by specialized manufacturers. Expert manufacturers, players, coaches, and bureaucrats all stamped material culture with messages about sportcraft, and who controlled it. As Maurice "Red" McLoughlin implored readers of his *Tennis as I Play It* (1915), "Don't get just 'a racket.' . . . I should say, 'Buy the best racket you can afford.'"²⁷ McLoughlin helped to reshape tennis and its image from a leisurely, elite exercise in ground strokes to an aggressive and "manly" sport of serve, attack, and volley. His voice had an impact in the marketplace. As he reminded his readers, a "real" racket had a name brand like Wright and Ditson, especially the new "McLoughlin" model. Such endorsements linked sporting goods firms with elite athletes and governing bodies in ways that legitimated each others authority in the marketplace.²⁸

SPALDING'S ATHLETIC LIBRARY.

WHAT TO WEAR FOR ATHLETICS

The manner in which competing athletes are dressed means a good deal to the athlete and to the spectators as well as an athletic meeting. If the spectators see a man come on the athletic field with unkempt uniform, one is apt to go away with a rather poor opinion of athletes in general. Therefore, it is certainly important that the athlete and the club official should see that the contestants are properly clothed.


The athlete should always dress neatly and keep his costume clean and in proper shape. We note how careful actors are of their personal appearance and clothing, especially when on the stage. The athlete, to a certain extent, occupies a similar position when competing in athletic contests. All eyes are riveted upon him, and to the public he is a sort of a hero. And the athlete who does keep himself properly—neat and clean—makes friends, even if he is not known personally to the audience.

A. G. Spalding & Bros. for over thirty years have been makers of athletic apparel, and make the most suitable goods for athletic contests. And so well is this fact recognized by the champion athletes that few of them wear anything but Spalding uniforms. Nearly all the important teams that have won honors in international competitions in recent years have had their uniforms furnished by A. G. Spalding & Bros. This was noticeable with the last American team which scored such a glorious victory in the Olympic games at Athens in 1906.

Another point of interest to all is the fact that Spalding supplies equipment for all known sports and pastimes, and has clothing to suit the athletes; it is immaterial whether they are schoolboys or champions. It is not the intention in this short article to go into details for each and every article contained in Spalding's Catalogue, but a glance at the same will convince one that there is absolutely nothing lacking. And they can rest assured that if Spalding sells it, it is correct.

SPALDING'S ATHLETIC LIBRARY.

Athletes should make it a point to have two suits of athletic apparel, one for competition and one for practice purposes. The clothing that some of our crack athletes wear in competition is a disgrace to athletics, and it adds a great deal to an athlete's appearance to appear neat and clean when taking part in athletic competition. In practice within one's club or grounds, almost any kind of clothing can be used. A sprinter should have two pairs of running shoes, one a very heavy pair for practicing in (the cross-country shoe, No. 14C, makes a very good shoe for this purpose, and can be had with or without spikes on heels), and a light pair for racing. One of the



No. 2-A. No. 14C.

best professional sprinters that ever wore a shoe made it a point to train for all his races in very heavy sprinting shoes. Aside from the benefit that is claimed for practicing in heavy shoes, you always feel as though you have a pair of shoes that will be ready for any race that is scheduled, and bear in mind it does not pay to buy athletic implements or clothing that are cheap. They don't wear and cannot give you the service that you will get from articles that are official and made by a reputable house.

It is very important that the beginner in athletics should know what to wear for the different sports. The cross-country

Manufacturers like the Spalding Bros. moved sportscraft to mass commodity. AN ATHLETIC PRIMER, ED. JAMES E. SULLIVAN SPALDING'S ATHLETIC LIBRARY, GROUP XII, NO. 87 (NEW YORK: AMERICAN SPORTS PUBLISHING CO., 1907), 130-131.

Equipment artifacts contain clues to stories beyond specialization. Equipment can be either democratic or elitist or both. Take golf. How and when did club names shift from exotic/traditional/elitist designations like “spoon,” “niblick,” or “mashee,” to a fundamentally numeric system (with some simple names like “wedge” or “driver”)? No doubt, simplicity improved understanding and sales. But some manufacturers may have resisted tinkering with the craft that was embedded in a name, just as surely as it was in the materials and their specifications. Innovation, technology, promotion, tradition, and craft have had wildly unstable relationships in the material culture of all sports, not just golf. Experts and governing bodies have played to all sides of the equation—sometimes championing innovation as an enhancement of craft (the klap skate) or safety (helmets in boxing and American football), sometimes opposing the dilution of craft (the oversized goalie pads in ice hockey).²⁹

Equipment also offers insight into the gendering of sportcraft. Every decision to create and promote special women’s equipment was both an opportunity and a threat. If women needed smaller clubs and rackets, or larger and softer balls, was that also proof that they could not compete in the real (i.e., men’s) games? Trails of this logic come often. In 1899, *Outlook* ran a patronizing story on the “Golfing Woman.” The opening scene recounted a young woman in a golf shop, looking for clubs to feed her new passion. Handed a driver made especially for women, she retorted: “I don’t want a lady’s club. . . . I am going to play real golf over the men’s course, and I want a man’s club to do it with.” Summarizing the trap in logic, the author remarked, “[W]hat sort of ‘real golf’ can a woman expect to play?”³⁰ More recently, Illinois State basketball coach Jill Hutchison recalled the 1984 controversy over mandating a smaller, lighter ball for women playing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): “It was kind of like, ‘Are you going to stay with the real game or lower your standards for women?’”³¹ In basketball, as in golf and most sports, equipment has seldom been sized on a broad spectrum of very small to very large. The fundamental distinctions have been men’s (or real) vs. women’s (or imitation).³²

Colors and Community

As the examples from golf and basketball suggest, material culture builds coral islands of difference and discrimination. Such is the nature of community development, another of the long residuals. In the world of sports, the “other” is a *sine qua non*. The attachments among players and fans as they anticipate, endure, or reflect on battles against their opponents, have long struck even the casual analyst as more visible if not stronger than most social bonds.³³ Competitors seem to represent larger groups in ways unmatched outside the military and politics. The simplicity of determining victory or defeat is one attraction to the sports community. So is material culture, particularly in the colors and images that groups chose to represent themselves.

Partisan colors have been central to sports communities for several millennia. The ancient Roman chariot races were organized into stables of reds, whites, blues, and greens. By the empire’s second century, Pliny the Younger complained of the “childish passion” he saw among the racing crowds. It was not the driver’s skill or the horse’s speed they cheered, Pliny lamented. That might be understandable. “But in fact,” he claimed, “it is the racing

colors they support.” If the drivers changed colors in mid-race, the crowd would change allegiance—“such is the popularity and importance of a worthless shirt.”³⁴ Then, as now, factions of spectators sat in sections that could be easily distinguished by their colors.

Passions between the Blues and Greens in the later Eastern Empire repeatedly erupted into wholesale conflict that occasionally spilled beyond the stadium. Over a forty-year span, from A.D. 491 to 532, partisans burned down Constantinople’s wooden stadium no fewer than four times, leading Emperor Justinian to build a “modern” marble structure. Justinian was one of many rulers who occasionally (and sometimes unwillingly) engaged the stadium’s factions in dialogue. Cheers or jeers from the Blues or the Greens could indicate support or opposition to a particular policy or person. The stadium factions were powerful forces that could either play along with or bait the will of those in power, even the emperor. At least one prominent scholar has argued that however riotous and engaged, these ancient factions did not represent particular socio-economic groups or religious sects. They were, at bottom, simply “supporters clubs” run amok. Such was the power of Pliny’s “worthless shirt.”³⁵

The history and social psychology of sporting colors await greater attention. In some cases—e.g. the Tour de France—colors define and organize the event itself. Not only does every team wear a different-colored jersey, but the best mountain climber wears the polka dot jersey, the best sprinter wears the green jersey, the best young rider wears the white jersey, the leading rider and/or overall winner wears the yellow jersey, and if a rider is a national champion from his country then he may wear his national colors as well. How and why did such systems develop? The origins of the Roman colors remain obscure, but more recent history suggests that colors have moved from the haphazard to the scientific. Some might say their essence has shifted—from authentic expressions of community to icons of alienated marketing. For instance, Harvard’s famous “Crimson” colors date to headbands worn in an 1858 boat race. Crew captain B.W. Crowninshield later recalled that the selection was casual: with his sister Alice, he “went down and bought six red handkerchiefs for the race.”³⁶ By contrast, the National Hockey League’s San Jose Sharks invested considerable time and money on market research and consultations with L.L. Bean (among others) before choosing teal and black. The payoffs were enormous—\$100 million in merchandise sold by the end of the franchise’s first year (1992-1993).³⁷ People around the world responded to the Sharks’s campaign slogan—“Reveal Your Teal”—and reinforced Pliny’s notion that colors really are at the heart of the sports community.

Team colors now create fan communities much faster via satellite television and the internet. While every professional league with a marketing plan has tried to tap into this new reality, no sport has rivaled world football for its ability to shape and reshape fan identity.³⁸ For instance, in the war-torn Baghdad of 2007, retailers like Ali Mohan saw a brisk trade in the colors of European teams such as Liverpool, Real Madrid, and Bayern Munich. As the UEFA Champions League schedule moved forward, adults and children purchased replica t-shirts to wear while they watched games in the relative safety of their homes. As Ali Mohan explained to *USA Today*, “Now I see 6- and 7-year-old children come to the shop and ask me for shirts for their European teams. . . . The reason is satellite TV has become legal since the invasion, and knowledge of the sport is spreading.”³⁹



Colors have a long history of tying fans to a particular sport community. COURTESY OF BILL SUTTON & ASSOCIATES.

Colors have become global commodities, tied to aggressive marketing plans, branding schemes, and larger business strategies—all developed by team owners who, in the minds of some commentators, seem to represent a significant shift from fan-loving sportsmen to ruthless and heartless moguls. While Iraqi kids were embracing Liverpool or Manchester United, what was happening back in England? How did working-class fans react to newer stadiums, higher ticket prices, luxury boxes, and the sushi crowd? How did fans respond to marketing campaigns that included changes in “traditional” team colors and marks? British scholars in particular have looked carefully for signs of alienation. Two recently claimed that some of Manchester United’s hardcore supporters felt the “club hierarchy” had “undermined” their experiences as fans and was “now interested only in profit and in the market.”⁴⁰ These scholars added that many fans have responded by refusing to purchase merchandise. Unfortunately, this statement is undocumented; one is left to ponder the meaning of “many.” Still, these scholars raise important questions about sporting colors and sporting communities.

Ephemera, Detritus, and Gambling

Fan groups bring multiple behaviors, including gambling, to sports venues and the areas around them. American estimates in the late 1990s put illegal sports betting (in the United States, only Nevada had legalized sports wagers) at \$80-\$100 *billion* annually, a staggering sum when the aggregate of all *legal* spending on American sports (i.e., the industry as a whole) amounted to about \$154 billion in 1995. Of course, sports betting represented only a portion of the total dollars (about \$600 billion) gambled annually in America. There is a big world of gambling outside of sports, but very few sports can be imagined without some element of gambling.⁴¹

Gambling links closely with *agon*, since a key element of *agon* is uncertainty. Unpredictable outcomes make sporting encounters exciting for contestants and spectators alike, and the unrelenting attempts to insure “a level playing field” represent efforts to guarantee an uncertain outcome by matching opponents by age, weight, skill level, or some type of handicap system as seen in bowling, golf and horse racing.

Agon's uncertainty is also essential to gambling. As psychologist Charlotte Olmsted put it, “[O]nly uncertainty is worth gambling over.”⁴² Sociologist Roger Caillois stated the case similarly: “Since the result of *agon* is necessarily uncertain and paradoxically must approximate the effect of pure chance, assuming that the chances of the competitors are as equal as possible, it follows that every encounter with competitive characteristics and ideal rules can become the object of betting, or *alea*, e.g., horse or greyhound races, football, basketball, and cock fights.”⁴³

Gambling is also a close cousin of craft; the psychological profiles run parallel. Like the athlete or coach, the gambler often banks on inside knowledge (the racing tip), special skills (poker bluffing), or well-designed fraud (the rigged table) to tip the odds in his or her favor. Commentators often refer to the successful gambler as “crafty.” Inveterate gamblers describe their addiction in terms of an unquenchable thirst for action, which means the pursuit of winning through their craft.⁴⁴

NOT TO BE USED IN VIOLATION OF EXISTING LAWS	
3 TEAMS-5 POINTS	8 TEAMS-75 POINTS
4 TEAMS-10 POINTS	9 TEAMS-120 POINTS
5 TEAMS-15 POINTS	10 TEAMS-200 POINTS
6 TEAMS-25 POINTS	15 TEAMS-500 POINTS
7 TEAMS-50 POINTS	9 OUT OF 10-25 POINTS
GAMES NOT PLAYED ON DATES SHOWN ARE VOID TIES LOSE	
COLLEGE FOOTBALL SAT OCT 17, 1998	
1. SYRACUSE	2. BOSTON COLLEGE +14
3. VIRGINIA	4. GEORGIA TECH +3
5. WAKE FOREST	6. MARYLAND +2
7. SO. MISSISSIPPI	8. ARMY +12
9. MISSOURI	10. OKLAHOMA +17
11. WISCONSIN	12. ILLINOIS +20
13. KANSAS STATE	14. OKLAHOMA STATE +21
15. COLORADO	16. TEXAS TECH +6
17. ALABAMA	18. E. CAROLINA +11
19. UTAH	20. FRESNO STATE +8
21. SMU	22. T.C.U. +3
23. FLORIDA	24. AUBURN +21
25. PENN STATE	26. PURDUE +10
27. U.S.C.	28. WASHINGTON STATE +10
29. ARIZONA	30. OREGON STATE +10
31. WASHINGTON	32. CALIFORNIA +10
33. MICHIGAN	34. NORTHWESTERN +15
35. TEXAS A + M	36. BAYLOR +7
37. L.S.U.	38. KENTUCKY +10
39. U.C.L.A.	40. OREGON +11
PRO-FOOTBALL SUNDAY OCT 18, 1998	
41. TAMPA BAY	42. CAROLINA +7
43. JACKSONVILLE	44. BUFFALO +4
45. PITTSBURGH	46. BALTIMORE +6
47. GIANTS	48. ARIZONA +2
49. MINNESOTA	50. WASHINGTON +14
51. TENNESSEE	52. CINCY +4
53. ATLANTA	54. NEW ORLEANS +8
55. SAN FRAN	56. INDY COLTS +18
57. DALLAS	58. CHICAGO +4
59. MIAMI	60. ST. LOUIS +7
61. SAN DIEGO	62. PHILLY +3
OVER & UNDERS PRO'S SUNDAY OCT 18, 1998	
63. OVER 38 TAMPA	64. UNDER 36 TAMPA
65. OVER 44 JACK	66. UNDER 42 JACK
67. OVER 39 BALT	68. UNDER 37 BALT
69. OVER 39 ARIZ	70. UNDER 36 ARIZ
71. OVER 45 MINN	72. UNDER 43 MINN
73. OVER 42 TENN	74. UNDER 40 TENN
75. OVER 39 N.D.	76. UNDER 37 N.D.
77. OVER 46 S. FRAN	78. UNDER 44 S. FRAN
79. OVER 42 DALLAS	80. UNDER 40 DALLAS
81. OVER 41 MIAMI	82. UNDER 39 MIAMI
83. OVER 36 S. DIEGO	84. UNDER 34 S. DIEGO
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.	
11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20.	
21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30.	
31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40.	
41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50.	
51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60.	
61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70.	
71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80.	
81. 82. 83. 84.	
Name _____	

Simple cards, such as this 1990s betting card, have driven much of America's sports betting over the last century. COURTESY OF STEPHEN HARDY.

Most of sport gambling's material culture has been in the form of ephemera or detritus—things with a short half-life; things to be thrown away. Betting “cards” have ranged from the flimsy photocopy in the fraternity house to the neon board at Vegas—in both cases, the information (if not the object) is transitory. At the same time, one can sense a constant interaction of existing or emerging technology with the long residuals of *agon*, *alea*, and craft. A good example is the football card, which has gradually expanded its size and its array of wagers—from the straight “line,” to the more exotic over/under, the parlay, the teaser, and the money line. One can bet on which team or player scores first, in the air or on the ground, or who is ahead by half. The list is confined only by the gambler's inside knowledge of the game.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, horse track gambling has moved from the oral tradition and paper scraps of the old pool system to the more refined and scientific look (but no less rapacious appetite) of the pari-mutuel machinery.⁴⁶

Technology has changed the face, if not the nature, of the action. Perhaps one could even argue that the sports board at Las Vegas is not the only electronic, high tech board promoting a wager on football, basketball, or baseball. Every scoreboard in every elegant, new venue pits the local score against a distant score. The game's time—measured in minutes, innings, halves, periods, or quarters—moves relentlessly forward, every new statistic on the board or the screen triggering the gamblers' frenzied drive for more and more action. Worse yet, the inveterate or the novice sports gambler may now get all the latest scores, injury reports, weather conditions, and betting lines on television, the internet, and cell phones. A major moment in this history occurred in 1994 when Motorola blitzed the market with direct mail ads for a hand-held pager—the Motorola Wireless Sports Channel—with the full-line “MVP” service running at over \$600 per year. It was the start of a new age in sports gambling.⁴⁷

Sports gambling is a popular and growing subject—for consumers and researchers alike. Historians like Steven A. Riess have made important contributions to our understanding of gambling's powerful role in shaping the development of sport. A closer look at material culture will only deepen that understanding.⁴⁸

Sportswear and *Eros*

Other drives propel humans to embrace sports and athletes. One is *eros*, the effects of physical attraction that tingle, excite, and sometimes inflame sexual passions. The social norms and practices that enable or restrain the erotic have been quite specific to time and place. As Thomas Scanlon has carefully argued, for instance, ancient Greek athletics and body culture changed dramatically in the seventh century B.C., when Dorian states such as Sparta developed “more formal systems of male upbringing which included pederasty, athletic training, and athletic nudity.” Such a system was soon incorporated into the emerging “crown” games at Nemea, Delphi, and Corinth. Homoeroticism was not only accepted, it was institutionalized in a way that is almost unthinkable today. At the same time, however, Scanlon notes that “the nudity of young and adult males in public competition aroused the desire of both male and female onlookers, sources tell us.”⁴⁹ That broader link between sport and *eros* is more readily understandable across the centuries. While a treasure of material evidence demonstrates the long connection between the two, perhaps the best contemporary example is the annual swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated*

that sells three times as many copies as regular issues and generates tens of millions of dollars in advertising revenue for its owners.⁵⁰

In *The Erotic in Sports* (1996), Allen Guttman mined centuries of source material to convey the long residual of sporting *eros*.⁵¹ Boxers in erotic poses on sixth-century B.C. black-figure vases seem to re-appear millennia later in the slick oil of George Bellows' paintings. It is not simply a sensuality confined to hitting people and being hit, although that is a powerful impulse. There is a broader erotic appeal to elegant, often sweaty, bodies in motion. *Skiing* magazine has for years tracked and promoted the sexiness of the snowsport. In 1996, it published "A Brief History of Sex and Skiing," which the editors introduced with a candid admission. "Since the beginning of skidom," they explained, "everyone from the Hollywood savvies to hawkers of beer, from ski areas to the skiers themselves, has capitalized on that sexiness. . . . After all, specs on binding torque and ski flex can only hold your interest for so long."⁵² Specs on the sensuality of skiing apparently do hold interest. In 1977, a University of Illinois researcher claimed to find that skiing produced elevated endorphins, which could triple sexual capacity and function.⁵³

And what about spectators? In 1997, *Sports Illustrated* described a scholarly study done at the University of Florida. Fifty Gator fans—representing low, medium, and high levels of attachment—were equipped to provide physiological and psychological responses to a set of slides that included images of Florida and non-Florida sports events. The scenes ranged from the "violent" to the "amorous" and the "neutral." Some fans responded so passionately to slides of football players Ike Hilliard and Danny Wuerffel that the university's media people concluded in their press release: "For die-hard Gator fans, seeing their favorite team in action is better than sex."⁵⁴

The Gator study would not surprise Allen Guttman. In *The Erotic in Sports*, he argued that equipment and uniforms have been integral elements of erotic appeal.⁵⁵ The development of women's sportswear offers a classic illustration of attempts to restrain or unleash this long residual. In the nineteenth century, corsets, stays, hobble skirts, and other devices restricted female movement in physical exercise and sport and ensured that women maintained ladylike decorum and demeanor. As sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves outlined, dress reforms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "gave women greater scope for movement" and "extended the range of activities available to them." At the same time, "sexless" high-necked and long-sleeved blouses, dark blue serge box-pleated gymslips, and black and brown woolen stockings de-emphasized the female form and its sensuous nature.⁵⁶ As Hargreaves and historian Susan Cahn also revealed, however, some athletes and manufacturers moved in a different direction. In the 1920s, France's Suzanne Lenglen "ruled the tennis world, tantalizing crowds" wearing sleeveless blouses, short skirts and "silk dancers' gowns that revealed the outlines of her body in the sunlight."⁵⁷ Such uniforms, stated Hargreaves, gave athletes like Lenglen a means to "assert themselves and to disrupt conventional images of femininity."⁵⁸ In Cahn's words, Lenglen "pioneered an ideal of the female body as physically and actively erotic."⁵⁹

As Cahn also noted, emancipation had its limits, which were sown into the fibers of post-WWII material culture. As female sporting performances improved, an unresolved social tension emerged in women's sport between masculine skills and feminine attractiveness. At first, administrators and officials in women's leagues tackled this tension with

explicit “dress codes” that prohibited “slacks and men’s shirts or socks” while promoters emphasized the “attractive femininity” and heterosexuality of sportswomen with sporting dress that heightened “beauty” and “modesty.” Tennis players, for example, “displayed their femininity and purity in white” dresses.⁶⁰

Today, commercial promoters, sponsors, and sportswear manufacturers clearly highlight the erotic aspects of femininity. Materials (e.g., elasticized body stockings, lycra leggings) and designs (e.g., high-cut leotards, skin-colored inserts between breasts) emphasize non-muscularized, lean female body forms and definition, and remove, in Hargreaves words, the traditional “distinction between the body and material.”⁶¹ And some governing bodies have followed suit, explicitly employing erotic dress codes to raise the profile of their sports. In 1999 the International Volleyball Federation imposed “*maximum* measurements” on female competitors in beach volleyball whose two piece uniforms could be “no more than 6cm [2½ inches] wide at the hips.”⁶² As Hargreaves reminds us, materially-enhanced body presentations “subtly aid in the reproduction of a system of ‘dominant heterosexuality’ which permeates sports.”⁶³

In a discussion of male voyeurs, Guttman argued that “the erotic appeal of the female athlete is to a large degree sport-specific.”⁶⁴ He seemed to mean that soccer icon Mia Hamm or pole vaulter Stacy Dragila would lose much of their sexual attraction in a sundress and pumps or a power suit and high heels. If Guttman is correct, then surely the same must be true for David Beckham in Armani clothing. In any event, material culture has for centuries provided looms on which athletes, promoters, artisans, physicians, and others have woven their beliefs, their hopes, and their dreams about the role of *eros* in sport.

Venues and Framing

Sports venues have also served to fan the flames of *eros*. Ovid understood this when he wrote his playful *Ars Amatoria* (*Art of Love*) during the reign of Augustus Caesar. Written as something of an ancient *Love Life for (Male) Dummies*, Ovid’s work provided lyrical advice on who, how, when, and where. Book One pointed quickly to the best hunting grounds—the arena and the stadium. “But especially hunt,” he advised, “in the round theaters. . . . Here you will find something for your lust, something you can play with.” Like ants to a picnic or bees to a blossoming garden, he continued, the most desired women would flock to the crowded games. Their purpose was clear: “they come to see, they come to be seen.” The *eros* of the venue, he concluded, is “fatal to chastity.”⁶⁵

Venues have also contributed to the long residual of community. Amid the roar of “us” and “them” one feels the electric surge of joy or rage, and in those sideward glances one can see looks of dejection. Nothing captures the sports community like the live event in the beloved or hated venue. In his eloquent tribute to Philadelphia’s Shibe Park, historian Bruce Kuklick captured much of this memory/community function: “[M]eaning and the items that bear it are fragile. The meanings accrue over time in their visible embodiments, artifacts like Shibe Park. Memories do not exist in the mind’s isolation but are connected to objects and stored in them.”⁶⁶ In Kuklick’s opinion, one’s identity, particularly in a large city, often rests in the “handed-down stories” or the recollections that link people and events with a place. To be a true Philadelphian meant worshipping in Shibe Park, knowing and sharing the special rituals attached to that special place.⁶⁷ It is precisely

the fear of losing such distinct identity that agitated critics of the “cookie cutter” stadiums that rose in cities around America in the 1970s. To these critics, the more recent “retro” parks such as Baltimore’s Camden Yards represented a swing back to Kuklick’s sense of real community.⁶⁸

But the new venues contain many paradoxes. For all the carefully designed quirks and quaintness, fans must develop shared memories amid more carefully segregated seating—loges, club seats, skyboxes, balconies.⁶⁹ What can fans share with each other through plexiglass? And the newest venues merge the spectator’s arena with peripheral restaurants, halls of fame, retail outlets, and virtual arcades—developed for the masses who can no longer afford to enter the holy shrine itself. It is all a new chapter in consumer and material culture: the sports mall.

Taken to new heights with the New England Patriots’ “Patriot Place,” the sports mall offers a point of entry into another of the long residuals, the “framing” of games within spectacle and festival.⁷⁰ Humans have a long history of framing their games (that is the *agon* and its craft) with circles of spectators and fun-lovers, who exchange money for sight-lines, food, and merchandise. As Guttman, Ovid, and Kuklick suggested, within and between these frames one will also find community, gambling, and *eros*.

The principal theorist on framing in sports, John MacAloon, drew upon the work of Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman to develop an important model of the Olympic games. MacAloon’s original model focused on the broad mass-media spectacle surrounding the Olympic festival, so that his concentric frames were game-festival-spectacle.⁷¹ Without contradicting MacAloon, one may argue that there also exists a clear frame of immediate “spectacle” between game and festival. That is the frame represented in the stands themselves. We suggest the sports venue and the sport experience, at their core, consist of the following three concentric frames: game-spectacle-festival, with a broader “mediated” frame of images beyond this.

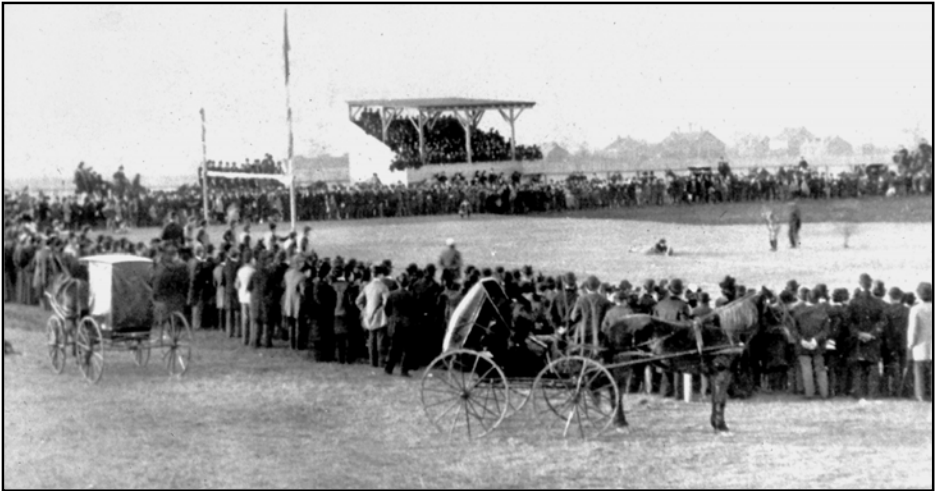
Sports frames are often bounded by objects like Veeck’s fence. Further, in MacAloon’s words, “frames have histories.”⁷² As MacAloon noted, the game (*agon*) itself is at the core of all sports frames. The game-frame, however, has seldom existed in isolation. Humans, attracted to displays of craft, and perhaps looking to nurture the sports community, have typically surrounded the game with a frame of spectacle. At times, as in early boxing, spectators themselves formed the “ring.” Formal rings, with specifications for size and materials, arrived later.⁷³ The same process occurred in baseball. Even into the twentieth century, fans often lined the field in big league ballparks.⁷⁴

The game/spectacle barrier, and its evolution in any sport, offers critical insights into shifting meanings and practices of fair play, bureaucracy, and consumer culture. For instance, at one time, rope or chicken wire mesh framed eastern American pro basketball courts—hence the name “Cage Game.” The cage barrier served many purposes, including keeping the ball in play and perhaps keeping rowdy fans off the court. Players also used the cage like the boards on a hockey rink, as a target for bouncing balls and opponents. Professionals eventually followed the fans to the open-frame style of college and high school basketball. In today’s National Basketball Association (NBA) arenas, the choicest seats are courtside, awaiting the next crashing leap of a Steve Nash or a Kobe Bryant. While basketball has removed most barriers between game and spectacle, sports like ice hockey have expanded and refined longstanding barriers with new materials that enhance sight lines

while protecting the fans from pucks, sticks, and elbows. In all cases, however, there is a clear taboo. Fans are not supposed to cross the frame from spectacle to game. Violations by soccer fans have resulted in harsher barriers like barbed wire and moats.⁷⁵

Outside the spectacle frame lies the festival, where fans may mingle, kibitz, eat, purchase souvenirs, and even turn their backs on the game itself. The festival frame has a long history in sports. After all, the great games of the ancient Greeks were adjuncts to larger religious gatherings. European folk games like football typically occurred on holiday festivals such as Shrove Tuesday.⁷⁶ In both cases, vendors sold their goods, their food and drink on the periphery of the contests. Some ancient stadiums included alcoves under the stands (which were often built on natural earthen ridges), where vendors could hawk their wares. Dio Chrysostom described the scene around the Isthmian Games with babbling poets, lawyers, assorted mountebanks and “a host of cheap-jacks selling everything under the sun.”⁷⁷

Today’s sports arenas contain our own cultural twists to these long residuals. One is the skybox, an amalgam of spectacle, festival, and exclusivity. The corporate suits in these plush containers may turn their backs on the field, but they do not fear missing the action; closed circuit televisions provide replays. For the great mass of ticketholders, there is the concourse—perhaps the single most important part of the modern sports venue.⁷⁸ The concourse is typically the threshold between the outside festival and the inside spectacle. In some arenas, such as Boston’s TD Banknorth Garden, the concourse runs outside the stands. After purchasing an overpriced hot dog and beverage, one moves through a long gate to enter the stands. In other venues, the concourse lies directly above the stands, offering a line of sight on the game itself. Wide concourses are *de rigueur* in contemporary sports facilities. They ring with the sounds of Dio’s cheap-jacks selling everything under the sun. They are a window to ancient Rome where Ovid described long trains of spectators moving in and out and around the theater and the circus, looking to see and be seen, to mingle, to flirt, to relax, and to spend.



A “ring” of fans provided the earliest form of the spectacle frame. 1895 football game, Franklin and Marshall versus Swarthmore. COURTESY OF RONALD A SMITH.

In America, nothing matches the festival frame and its tailgating before the “big” football game. As early as the 1890s, New York City hosted “big games” between Yale and Princeton, closely covered in national magazines by feature writers like Richard Harding Davis. Manhattan Field would be packed with 30,000 spectators singing songs and chanting cheers in ways now lost in North America (but alive in the world’s great football venues). The bigger show, however, was before the game, outside the field, in the long parades of partisans marching and riding down Fifth Avenue hours before game time, in what Davis called a “circus procession many miles long,” coaches festooned in yellow or blue, filled with young men and women “smothered in furs; and the flags, as they jerk them about, fill the air with color,” cheered on by crowds four deep along the sidewalks. As Davis concluded, “To-day the sporting character of the event has been overwhelmed by the social interest.”⁷⁹

It has long since become big business. As one geographer has shown, the spectacle and festival elements of American college football have placed large, indelible footprints on college towns such as Auburn, Alabama, even though the events occur on only a few days per year.⁸⁰ The American Tailgaters Association estimated that, in 2006, 50 million American tailgaters spent \$7-\$15 *billion* on food and equipment. Tailgating is conspicuous consumption. As one television executive told *Business Week*, these fans “spend money like crazy. You park by the same person every week, and you have to have something to show off.”⁸¹ By some estimates, 35 percent of tailgaters never even enter the stadium. With this group in mind, DirectTV launched a portable satellite television in May of 2007—available for a mere \$1,499.

As we noted earlier, venue frames contain elements of other residual practices. Politicians and boosters have, for instance, regularly played the “community” card when they have supported the financial interests of their sports mogul friends seeking public investments in stadium development. In recent years, however, independent scholars have blown up older arguments about the economic benefits of such public investments—in fact, the general public gets little or no economic benefits. In response, stadium boosters have retreated to a core argument about “psychic” benefits (i.e., communities feeling good about themselves when their team wins in the beautiful new venue). For the residents who live near such venues there are few warm and fuzzy feelings about traffic jams, excess noise, or public urination. In cultural geographer John Bale’s telling phrase: “When Saturday comes, football is a nuisance.”⁸² Elsewhere Bale argued that the frames of sports venues cast a wide and often troubling aspect over their surrounding communities.⁸³ The concept of “frames” helps us to understand the long historical dimensions of how sports venues have been built and experienced.

The Force of Material Culture in the Sport Industry

Material culture both drives and reflects the meanings that humans attach to sports. In an industrial world, however, the purveyors of objects have special influence. This is particularly true in the world of sport, where governing bodies guard their domains like jealous lovers. Within a single sport (e.g., American football) the National Football League (professional body) is often at policy odds with the NCAA (collegiate authority) over the recruitment and retention of talent, over playing rules, and over revenue streams from big media. Governing bodies like the NCAA or the United States Olympic Committee (USOC)

are powerful, to be sure, but their power is often limited by the balkanized structure of the industry.

No such boundaries limit Nike or adidas, who can and will cut their deals at all levels and with all sports at once. Their influence washes over the entire industry, permeating all sports, all levels, all rules, and all bureaucracies. Nothing conveys this cascade effect better than the 1992 Barcelona “Dream Team” of USA Basketball. For the first time, the best American professionals competed in Olympic basketball, the result of long negotiations between the USOC, USA Basketball, the NBA, and the International Basketball Federation (FIBA). The Americans cruised to the gold medal as expected. At the medal ceremony, some players, including Michael Jordan, refused to wear the required Team USA warmup uniform. The reason? It was splashed with the logo of Reebok, the team sponsor, whereas Michael and others represented Nike. They could not possibly promote Reebok. Membership on the American team was a secondary issue. The players knew who paid the most lucrative contracts. If USA Basketball did not understand, the millions of American kids wearing Nike’s Air Jordans did: it was all about shoes.

Nike, Reebok, and Adidas are by no means the first manufacturers to wield enormous influence over the sport industry. One hundred years ago, the Spalding Company was far more powerful. Material goods have always had leverage in a capitalist sports environment. One of the reasons is their ability to flood the market—at all levels—with a deluge of goods. If their equipment or merchandise challenges existing rules or norms, the governing bodies are often at a disadvantage. After all, who has the greater “material” interest?⁸⁴

Major League Baseball learned this lesson in the 1940s, in the Trapper glove controversy. When players started wearing gloves in the 1870s, the baseball establishment worried about the impact on both manliness and fair play. Very quickly, however, manhood yielded to effectiveness. The rules committee watched the growth of gloves until 1895, when they limited the size of all gloves but the catcher’s and the first baseman’s. This did not stop players from designing more intricate (and effective) webs and pockets. First basemen went even further. Sportswriter Shirley Povich claimed that in the 1930s Hank Greenberg’s mitt had the “dimensions of a snowshoe.”⁸⁵ The Rawlings Company’s famous “Glove Doctor” Harry Latina took the craft one step further, inventing the “Trapper Claw,” the broad, three-fingered glove of choice for first basemen. Early in 1949, the Rules Committee announced a crack-down that appeared to threaten the claw’s existence. Commissioner Happy Chandler was determined to preserve the game’s integrity. Or so he thought. The problem was that manufacturers had flooded the market with the now-illegal gloves. Fred Bowman, the president of Wilson, claimed that the industry faced losses of between \$1,500,000 and \$1,750,000. The “big four” manufacturers—Spalding, Wilson, Rawlings, and MacGregor—enlisted Taylor Spink, publisher of the *Sporting News* and the *Sporting Goods Dealer*, to press their case. Chandler may have wanted to save the game, but *they* needed to save their material interest. Chandler backed down; the rules change was delayed and watered down.⁸⁶ In subsequent decades, issues of skill and integrity remained clearly under the control of sporting goods manufacturers.⁸⁷

Happy Chandler’s defeat illustrates the rich potential for historical analysis into the material culture of sport. Historians have sometimes described the forces of change in abstract terms such as “modern sport,” or “technology,” or “the media.” These are all

important notions. But we would do well to reread Marx's response to Hegel. History, Marx argued, moves through "material, empirically verifiable" acts, not through "a mere abstract act on the part of the 'self consciousness,' the world spirit, or any other metaphysical spectre."⁸⁸ Our "long residuals" cannot exist independent of the everyday, material world of humans who continually create, challenge, and reinforce ways of thinking and acting. Equally important, their "forces" of energy often find their way into material objects.

Historians of skiing, surfing, and (as conveyed above) women's sportswear have provided exemplary studies of the close links between material culture and everyday experience. Patricia Vertinsky and Sherry McKay have brilliantly analyzed the shifting meanings of gendered space in the history of a gymnasium.⁸⁹ There is both room and need for more such studies. The history of skis, boards, gloves, clubs, stadiums, and helmets yields great insights into the changing and enduring meanings of sport. As forms of evidence and sources of inquiry, material objects are just as important as the minutes of powerful governing bodies, the recollections of hard-driving magnates and ingenious coaches, or the daily reports and scandals conveyed in the sporting press. While the material culture of any era is clearly influenced by conditions specific to time and place, we also suggest that prizes, equipment, apparel, ephemera, arenas, and stadiums also reveal longer-term forms of thinking and acting. *Agon*, craft, community, festival, spectacle, gambling, and *eros* have been stitched into colors, injected into balls, and embedded in the venues of sport across centuries and continents.



¹Bill Veeck with Ed Linn, *Veeck—As In Wreck* (New York: Signet, 1986), 54.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Jules Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, eds. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1993), 1. On Veeck's veracity, see David M. Jordan, Larry R. Gerlach, and John P. Rossi, "Bill Veeck and the 1943 Sale of the Phillies," <http://www.sabr.org/cmsFiles/Files/Bill_Veeck_and_the_1943_sale_of_the_Phillies.pdf> [22 June 2008].

⁵For thoughtful treatments of material culture and sport, see Bruce Kidd, "The Making of a Hockey Artifact: A Review of the Hockey Hall of Fame," *Journal of Sport History* 23 (1996): 328-334; Wray Vamplew, "Facts and Artefacts: Sports Historians and Sports Museums," *Journal of Sport History* 25 (1998): 268-282; Murray Phillips, Mark O'Neill, and Gary Osmond, "Broadening Horizons in Sport History: Films, Photographs, and Monuments," *Journal of Sport History* 34 (2007): 271-293; Linda Borish, "Women at the Modern Olympic Games: An Interdisciplinary Look at American Culture," in *Quest* 48 (1996): 43-56; Liz Zanoni, "American Women's Sporting Attire, Consumer Culture, and Material Culture in the 1920s and 1930s," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the North American Society for Sport History, Green Bay, Wisconsin, 29 May 2005, copy in possession of authors.

⁶Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Toward an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 75.

⁷See "World Records on Slap, Normal Skates to be Separated," 21 February 1998, *Shinano Mainichi Newspaper Nagano Olympic Website*, <<http://www.shinmai.co.jp/oly-eng/19980221/0008.htm>> [21 June 2008]. Within a decade the ISU made no such distinction on its website. On the Speedos, see "Additional Hi-tech Swimsuits Approved for Beijing," *USA Today* online, 4 June 2008, <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/olympics/2008-06-04-swimsuits_N.htm> [21 June 2008]; Kelli Anderson,

“The War of the Swimsuits,” *Sports Illustrated*, 23 June 2008, pp. 54, 56.

⁸Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System (Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century)* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), xi. Wallerstein classified history as a social science and thus believed it should focus on universals. However, he accepted the fact that most historians view history as a humanity concerned with particulars. For a lengthy discussion see Immanuel Wallerstein, *World System Analysis (An Introduction)* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-22.

⁹For the broad view, see Allen Guttmann, *Sports: The First Five Millennia* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

¹⁰Thomas F. Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

¹¹Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 16. Kyle himself carefully discusses the use of modern terms like “sport” to describe ancient practices. See also Nigel Crowther, *Sport in Ancient Times* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2007), xii, xxi.

¹²Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 30, 75. Braudel contrasted the *longue duree* (e.g., patterns of agriculture) with two other levels of analysis—conjunctures (e.g., the French Revolution) and events (e.g., the storming of the Bastille).

¹³Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122.

¹⁴On performance, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For sport and ritual, see John MacAloon, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

¹⁵See Bernard Mullin, Stephen Hardy and William Sutton, *Sport Marketing*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 2007), 147-170.

¹⁶C.M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing, 1957), 21. Emphasis added.

¹⁷Robert Morford and Stanley Clark, “The Agon Motif,” *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews* 4 (1976): 163.

¹⁸Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 23, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1990), 567. For an excellent discussion of the Homeric games, see Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle*, 54-65.

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²²Tony Perrottet, *The Naked Olympics* (New York: Random House, 2004), 85. See also Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle*, 131-133.

²³Mike Cronin, “Sam Maguire: Forgotten Hero and National Icon,” *Sport in History* 25 (2005): 203.

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²⁶Cited in Studs Turkel, *Working* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 385.

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²⁸See also Stephen Hardy, “Adopted by All the Leading Clubs,” in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 71-104.

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³¹Laurie Bollig, "The Bouncing Ball Turns 12," *NCAA News*, 10 February 1997, p. 16.

³²See also Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in 20th Century Women's Sport* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

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