The Push and Pull of Power:
Organized Sports in Industrialized Britain

By:
Skyler Jones

I.   **Introduction:** *Sports within a Complex Society*

The social historian John Hargreaves defines hegemony as the "achievement by a class...of leadership over the rest of society, in accordance with its perceived interest."[1] This is achieved when the dominant class is able to "preempt and disorganize opposition, so that the major forces in society are unified behind the hegemonic group and forceful, coercive measure against opposition to the pattern of hegemony acquire legitimacy as well."[2] Bernard Semmel, in his book *Imperialism and Social Reform*, offers a similar formula for social hegemony: "The receipt of monopolistically high profits by the capitalists...makes it economically possible for them to corrupt certain sections of the working class, and for a time a fairly considerable minority, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or nation against all the others."[3] If one were to watch and analyze a modern sporting event, they would find many of these hegemonic tactics at play.

The game is likely to be held in a large stadium that is owned by a few wealthy individuals. The average citizen is only allowed access during specific times for a specific fee, and once this average citizen enters the stadium, their viewing position is determined by the amount of money they are willing to spend on their ticket. The wealthy are in the front, the poor are in the back. Yet they are also all united. For the length of the organized sporting event everyone in the stadium, rich and poor, act as a cohesive body. They are all fans. They all cheer in unison despite their wildly different economic and social circumstances outside of the stadium. They do not question the hegemonic structure of the seating or the hegemonic relationships between the players and owners. They are there to forget these things, despite being

---

[1] John Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture: a Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 7.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 16.

surrounded by them. To some, this is the beauty of sports. To others, this is what make sports loathsome.

This begs the question: Are sports simply a manipulation tool used by the capitalist to pacify the worker? Or are they one of the few activities that unite the social classes and liberate the worker from their supposedly dreary circumstances? To answer this question effectively one must analyze the origin and maturation of organized sports within a complex society.

The study of English leisure history suggests that organized sports were neither a strictly capitalistic method of indoctrinating the average laborer into the functions of a capitalist society or a purely joyous activity meant to unite the different classes under the umbrella of gamesmanship and camaraderie. Instead, they were a combination of both repression and unification, with both sides—the ruling and the ruled—pushing back against any action or decree they felt was not of their own making.

II.   *'An Avalanche of Work:'* The Transformation of Leisure

The history of organized sports in England is essentially a history of leisure. Long before sports were played by millionaire athletes in front of tens of thousands of fans they were an act of leisure performed in the open fields and churchyards of pre-industrial England. But even during this period of diffuse and non centralized power, there was still a strong connection between popular sports and the aristocracy. Starting as early as 1660 wealthy Englishman would organize competitive cricket matches out on their country estates that were attended by large crowds and veracious gamblers. Competitive horseracing was also organized by the landowning

elite. The Jockey Club at Newmarket was founded by several aristocrats in 1750, and became the leader in organizing horse racing events.[4]

Although these facts make it seem like the aristocracy had outright control over popular entertainment during the 17th century, their power was far more diffuse than one might think. The aristocracy was composed of a collection of large manors and estates without a standing army or any other form of brute power that could be quickly mobilized to crush an uprising. They may have had control over the organization of events, but they didn't have "cultural hegemony,' and would often have to bow to the power of the working class mob.[5]

What prevented this diffuse style of ruling from persisting was the rapid industrialization of the English economy starting in the mid 18th century. With this change in economic structure came a similar change in how both the emerging working class and the emerging capitalist class interacted. Power quickly became concentrated in various industrial centers across the country. This not only brought a large portion of the former peasants and farmers into densely populated areas in and around the factories, but it also consolidated many of the once separate forms of power into single entities. As John Hargreaves, in his book *Sport, Power and Culture* points out, "Factory employers were often prominent Methodist laymen...the local clergyman could be the local land-owner of magistrate; and the factory or land owner could be the Member of Parliament."[6]

The ultimate consequence of this consolidation of people and power was a dramatic restructuring of how the emerging working class spent their time. In pre-industrial England, leisure time was not seen as separate and distinct from work. As Peter Bailey summarized in his book *Leisure and Class in Victorian England,* daily life was "seasoned with a

[4] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture, 17*.
[5] E. P Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture." *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (January 1974).
[6] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture, 21*.

good deal of complimentary socialiability," and the yearly calendar was "generously studded with festivals and holidays that derived their warranty and meaning from an intimate connection with the seasonal rhythms of the agricultural year and the working life of the community."[7] This fluid integration of socialization and work was dismantled once most of the English population was working in the highly structured worlds of factory production. Slowly but surely, leisure "disappeared under the avalanche of work."[8]

The working day of the early 19th century factory worker was not just long, but infused with "unprecedented regularity and intensity."[9] Bailey points out that in 1834, "there were only eight statutory half-holidays in England, and the traditional religious feast days and the celebrations of seasonal tasks or particular trades had been considerably pruned, both by the employers and the Church."[10] Factory work was now the central occupation of most people's lives, leaving little time for leisure or any other superfluous activities unrelated to production.

What made the British government and its abetting capitalists reconsider the "avalanche of work" they were unloading on their employees with unbroken regularity was the series of uprisings and working class rebellions that occurred as the first half of the 19th century came to a close.

III.   *The Workers Respond: The Chartist Rebellion*

The largest and most worrisome of these was the Chartist Rebellion. When the British government refused to afford the right to vote to anyone other than property owning men in the Reform Act of 1832, thousands of working class people began to organize to try to garner rights

---

[7] Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.
[8] Ibid, 4.
[9] Ibid, 22.
[10]Ibid, 25.

for the landless. The Reform act is a document of particular importance if one wishes to understand the emerging social tensions of industrialized England. It was the first time in modern history that a country explicitly laid out the rules for participating in government based upon class lines. As Chartist historian Dorothy Thompson states, "The line drawn for the exercise of the franchise was precisely made to include all members of the middle and upper classes and to exclude all wage-labourers."[11] This law made it obvious that the members of parliament didn't want the workers attaining power and adjusting the gruesome but extremely prosperous structure of the factory system. They wanted the social structure to remain rigid.

The frustration of the working class was exacerbated when the New Poor Law of 1834 prevented any governmental relief to the sick and lame other than strenuous work within a poorhouse or labor camp. In 1838, fed up with these blatant decrees against their sovereignty, the leaders of the working class produced the People's Charter, a list of demands that the English government needed to meet if they wished to prevent an outright rebellion. From this document the leaders of the working class rebellion took their name: The Chartists. Dorothy Thompson, in her seminal work on the Chartist movement, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution,* lists out the demands of the People's Charter: "universal male suffrage, protected by the ballot, the abolition of property qualifications for members of Parliament, the payment of Members, equal electoral districts and annual parliaments."[12] In short, they wanted a representative democracy. The Parliament rejected these demands, leading to a decade of rebellion, large-scale riots, and organized strikes across the United Kingdom.

As the Chartist movement gained strength several petitions containing slight variations on the original charter were signed by millions of Britons and submitted for consideration to

---

[11] Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 5.
[12] Ibid, preface.

parliament. They were all rejected. After years of thwarted attempts at reform, the movement eventually petered out at the start of the second half of the century, largely due to political infighting and diminishing popular support. But as Dorothy Thompson and other historians recognized, the Chartist movement, "came nearer to being a mass rebellion than any other movement in modern times."[13]

Although the movement is considered a failure, it led to the creation of the strongest sense of working class solidarity in England up until that point. Workers from all across the country were involved in the movement, and many of them sacrificed their jobs and even their lives for their belief in political change. As Thompson states, "the political question dominated all others."[14] The first major organized working class rebellion did not lead to the social upheaval its leaders had hoped for, but the working class was now established as a recognizable force in the political and social arenas of 19th century England, forcing the upper class to acquiesce to some of their demands.

IV.   *Rational Recreation and the Rise of Middle Class Reformers*

After the Chartist rebellion, politicians began to consider the wants and needs of the working class with greater severity. Robert Slaney, a British politician in office during the years of the rebellion, said that the "neglected classes" were in dire need of "regulated amusement," which would work as "safety valves for their eager energies."[15]

Benjamin Heywood, a banker from Northern England, agreed with Slaney. He believed that if the English did not want their social structure to collapse, institutions would have to be put into place that developed "mutual confidence and regard between the working man and his

---

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid, 1.
[15] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 48.

employer."[16] This meant that the working man had to feel respected, as if he were part of the "community of enjoyment" once occupied exclusively by the upper class.[17] If more employees were treated this way, they wouldn't have to latch onto what Haywood deemed the "wild schemes of political agitators."[18] In other words, they wouldn't feel the need to rise up like those who partook in the Chartist rebellion. Heywood responded to the Chartist rebellion by opening up recreational centers in an attempt to develop "a more kindly intercourse between the different classes of people."[19] This was the start of the upper class' concentrated attempt at assuaging class animosity through leisure.

What Haywood may have left out of his address was the delicate line between what was considered rational recreation and what was considered a wild scheme of political agitators. The middle-class reformers of the 1840s and 1850s wanted the working class to lessen their intake of alcohol in favor of more restorative recreations, but they didn't want them to become too interested in restoration in fear that the "radical culture" of Chartism or other working class movements would become too appealing.[20] This left a rather limited amount of activities for the working class to participate in without drawing the scorn of the middle and ruling classes.

Unfortunately, the activities that reform groups like the Temperance Society and the Manchester Mechanics Institution, a school created to further the education of the working class, ended up endorsing were often too dry and unattached to the traditional pleasures of the working class to seem appealing. As Henry Mayhew put it in his groundbreaking 1851 study of the working poor, *London Labour and the London Poor:*

---

[16] Benjamin Heywood, *Address Delivered at the Manchester Mechanics Institution* (Manchester: Charles Knight and co., 1843), 120.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 48.

It is because "serious" people generally object to enlist the emotions in the education of the poor...that the amusements of the working-classes are left to venal traders to provide. Hence, in the low-priced entertainments which necessarily appeal to the poorer, and, therefore, to the least educated of the people, the proprietors, instead of trying to develop in them the purer sources of delight, seek only to gratify their audience in the coarsest manner, by appealing to their most brutal appetites.[21]

Mayhew was essentially expressing what many working class people felt but couldn't articulate. He was saying that the recreations of the upper classes were too boring for the working class to consider. Of course, Mayhew's sentiments were never considered by many of the most zealous reformers. Even though they recognized the need to provide 'safety valves' for the working class, they couldn't agree on what the correct form of recreation was.

Even with their newly achieved right to vote, most workingmen and women of this time period spent almost all of their waking hours occupied by the unending drudgery of the factory. This led many of them to partake in the one recreational activity that didn't require much energy or discipline: the act of getting drunk. Francis Place, one of the early advocates for working class rights and a leader of the Chartist movement, criticized the crippling psychological effect of the factory schedule in his 1834 book *Improvement of the Working People: Drunkenness--Education.* He claimed that the working man was plagued by "constant unremitted toil," a condition that forced many to "solace themselves...in liquor."[22]

This was not the only working class recreation that middle-class reformers like Place were criticizing. Reform movements with the mission to curtail or outright end many of the exclusively lower class recreational activities swept through England during the 30s and 40s. The burgeoning temperance movement ended drinking at different annual fairs and festivals, while

---

[21]Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: George Woodfall, 1851), 41.

[22] Francis Place, *Improvement of the Working People: Drunkenness—Education* (London: C. Fox, 1834), 13-15.

the introduction of full-time police led to the end of blood sports like dog fighting and bull running.[23]

These 'new police' became the battering ram for the middle-class reformers, cracking down on any working class activity that seemed overtly lascivious or immoral. But instead of noting all the different activities that became criminal, it may be more poignant to this particular topic to note the activities that received little to no curtailment or policing, most notably the organized sport of horse racing.[24] In the 1840s, the English parliament declared that horseracing was "in accordance with a long-established national taste, because it serves to bring together for a common object, vast bodies of people in different parts of the country, and to promote intercourse between different classes of society."[25] This edict makes it clear that the ruling class recognized the highly publicized arena of organized sporting events as both a meeting ground for the intermingling of the classes, and a means for the ruling class to display their superiority and power.

E.P. Thompson called the ostentatious displays that the oligarchy put on at such events as the "Theatre of the Great."[26] Aside from receiving separate seating, late arrivals, and early exits, the gentry also displayed their power by granting fabulous prizes to the winning contestants. As John Hargreaves notes "[the gentry's] style of participation symbolized and reproduced the social hierarchy."[27]

After the Chartist rebellion was defeated in the 1848, working class revolt became less of a concern for the British ruling class. It was still an issue of importance, but it was no longer considered the greatest threat to the social structure of the country. As Peter Bailey puts it in his

---

[23] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 32-35.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture."
[27] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture, 19.*

book *Leisure and Class in Victorian England,* the British "governing class" was more concerned with "assault from without, more than from within."[28]

V.   *Athletics in the Military*

Much of the government's fears of invasion and degeneracy came after the mismanagement of the Crimean War in the mid-1850s. Although the British and their allies technically won the war, thousands of troops died from minor battle wounds, unsanitary living conditions, and poor health habits (most of which consisted of "drinking and whoring," as James D. Campbell remarked).[29] This led many concerned citizens to create various military-oriented reform groups in an attempt to curb the degeneration that many critics linked to industrialization and amorality.

Largely through the efforts of Florence Nightingale, one of the early advocates for modern nursing practices, the Army Sanitary Commission was founded just after the war with the goal of improving the health and well-being of soldiers. Along with improvements to hospital care and living quarters, the commission instituted "mandatory gymnastics and voluntary regimental sports" for all enlisted men.[30] This led to the creation of the Army Gymnastic Staff in 1860.

Aside from increasing the health and physical fitness of the average enlisted man, the introduction of athletics into military training also led to a surprisingly new aspect of military life: fraternization within ranks. Prior to the introduction of organized sport and exercise into the military regiment, interactions between soldiers and their commanding officers almost never

---

[28] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 32-35
[29] James D. Campbell, *The Army Isnt All Work: Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860-1920* (Routledge, 2017), 24.
[30] Ibid, 30.

occurred. As Field Marshal Sir William Robertson stated in regards to the average British private, "in not a few regiments his officers saw little or nothing of him, except when on parade or at the stables, [and] they showed no interest in his personal concerns and sometimes did not even know his name, although he might have been under his command for weeks."[31] This was partly due to the class division between average enlisted men and their commanding officers.

For most of the 19th and 20th century, the officers of the British military consisted almost exclusively of men from the rural upper class. Most of these men had families that owned and maintained vast estates in the country. It was on these estates they learned many of the outdoor sports that were popular with the English aristocracy. The two primary sports practiced in the open fields of these manors were cricket and rugby. It was long believed that the skills developed from playing and mastering these games could easily be transferred to the battlefield. As the 2nd Viscount Esher, a military theorist and historian, said in 1907, "If the officer is rich he can devote his day to any form of sport, or any of those manly games, which differentiate the British regimental officer from the officers of all other armies, and for certain purposes, are invaluable training for war."[32] The enlisted men, on the other hand, often grew up too poor to partake in such time consuming, costly games.

Also, games that required large swaths of open land like cricket and rugby were often unavailable to the landless city dweller or townspeople. When private consolidation of land became popular during the mid-1800s, poor children could no longer use open fields to play cricket. But this didn't stop them. As a writer for the *Worcester Chronicle* put it, "now they are driven from every green spot, and in Bromsgrove here, the nailor boys, from force of

---

[31] Ibid, 41.
[32] Ibid, 22.

circumstances, have taken possession of the turnpike road to play the before-mentioned games."[33]

The lower class also participated in the sport of Pedestrianism. Not unlike the Strongman contests of today, pedestrianism was usually a very long footrace. But there were also strange variations to these races. Sometimes a race would involve carrying a heavy object or pushing along wheelbarrows filled with stones. As to be expected, the upper class didn't participate in pedestrianism. As one landlord reported in January of 1862, "The betting was heavy, the sport admirable, the management insufferable...not until half the proceedings were over did the proprietor send for the police to keep order, as is usual on all running grounds."[34] Other members of the upper class called it an "indecent nuisance" and thought it to be beneath the more organized sports of cricket and rugby.[35] Supporters of popular sports lashed out against these tightly wound rules of decorum decreed by the upper class. As one popular sports writer put it, games like pedestrianism "show what a large balance there still is versus that crushing respectability which threatens to overwhelm us--it tells us how much of the animal pleasures of savage life survives in the heart of civilised life."[36] This is a minor but instructive example of the push and pull of upper-class regulation and lower class reaction.

The strict social class divide in organized sports participation began to fade once the British government recognized that these organized games could be beneficial for both the officer and the common soldier. The two groups began to cross paths on the playing field, thus uniting their interests around the more respectable games. The first organized sporting match between officers and infantrymen took place in May of 1872. Since then "rank-integrate sporting

---

[33] Christina Hole, *English Sports and Pastimes* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1949), 3.
[34] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 141.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

events" have become an integral part of British military life.[37] A few decades before the military

adopted organized sport as a means of training, another British institution, the public school,

began to integrate organized sport into their curriculum.

VI.   *Indoctrination through Athletics: at Home and Abroad*

At first many social critics were worried about the spiritually damaging effects of the

pursuit of sport and physical recreation. Thomas Arnold, in his 1869 book *Culture and Anarchy,*

stated that,

> both bodily health and vigour, it may be said, are not to be classed with wealth and population as mere
> machinery; they have a more real and essential value. True; but only as they are more intimately connected with a
> perfect spiritual condition than wealth and or population are. The moment we disjoin them from the idea of a perfect
> spiritual condition, and pursue them as we do pursue them, for their own sake and as ends in themselves, our
> worship of them becomes as mere worship of machinery, as our worship of wealth or population, and as
> unintelligent and vulgarising using a worship as that is.[38]

His fear of spiritual degradation was matched by English schoolmaster Edward

Lyttelton's fear of intellectual degradation. He saw athletics as "a training shackled by many an

antiquated abuse and sadly marred by countless stupidities."[39] But even with this backlash, many

schoolmasters saw sport as a predominately unifying and uplifting activity.

At Thomas Arnold's Rugby school, the lower class sport of football--originally a brutal

mix of rugby and soccer-- was transformed into a "gentlemanly sport" with rules more akin to

the ones seen in modern football matches.[40] Arnold himself had only a passing interest in

---

[37] Campbell, *The Army Isn't All Work*, 40

[38] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: and Other Writings,* ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 66.

[39] J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (London: Falmer Press, 1986), 7.

[40] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture, 39.*

organized sports, but his disciples recognized immediately that participation in sports helped young men develop the "personal moral image."[41]

In his book *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools,* J.A. Mangan claims that at Marlborough, one of the public schools he studied, the introduction of organized sports into the school was related to the rapid increase in population that came between the years 1843 and 1848.[42] With this rise in population came degradation in order and piety. The schoolmaster G.E.L. Cotton used organized sport to help curtail the chaotic nature of young boys and to channel their energy into more useful pursuits. As Mangan concludes after analyzing this early introduction of sports into the public school system, "the important point is that one of the origins of athleticism lay in the utilization of games as a form of *social control."[43]*

Herbert Spencer, an influential intellectual of the late 19th century and one of the first champions of social Darwinism had similar interpretations of the value of widespread education. In his 1902 book *Facts and Comments,* he said, "If supply and demand are allowed free play in the intellectual sphere as in the economic sphere, and no hindrance is put in the way of the naturally superior, education must have an effect widely different from that described— [it] must conduce to social stability..."[44]

Not only did sports quell the unruliness of young men, but it directed their desires towards the interests of the nation. In the second half of the 19th century, when British imperialism was at its height, this became a particularly valuable attribute. T.L. Papillon, an English scholar living during the second half of the 19th century, explains the value of sports from a national standpoint:

---

[41] Thomas Arnold, *Thomas Arnold on Education: a Selection from His Writings*, ed. Thomas William Bamford (London: Cambridge U.P, 1970).

[42] Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, 26.

[43] Ibid, 28.

[44] Herbert Spencer, *Facts and Comments* (London: D Appleton and Company, 1902), 83.

> Many a lad who leaves an English public school disgracefully ignorant of the rudiments of useful knowledge, who can speak no language but his own, and writes that imperfectly, to whom the noble literature of his country and the stirring history of his forefathers are almost a sealed book, and who has devoted a great part of his time and nearly all his thoughts to athletic sports, yet brings away with him something beyond all price, a manly straightforward character, a scorn for lying and meanness, habits of obedience and command, and fearless courage. Thus equipped, he goes out into the world, and bears a man's part in subduing the earth, ruling its wild folk, and building up the Empire.[45]

Games with clear rules and honest players—gentlemanly games, that is—may have been anti-intellectual, but they bred young men with qualities that were extremely valuable to maintaining the health and power of the British Empire.

Not only did many British leaders recognize sport as an effective way of indoctrinating their own young people to the rules and attitudes of the current social order, but they found sports to be just as effective at doing the same to people of the countries they were colonizing.

Brian Stoddart, in his article "Sport, cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire" states that, "British imperialism lay outside simple bureaucratic and military force."[46] What was more important was what he termed "cultural power—the set of ideas, beliefs, rules, and conventions concerning social behavior that was carried throughout the empire."[47] An under-recognized aspect of this cultural power was the lessons and ideologies drawn from organized sports.

Many of the political and military leaders that started and maintained the second wave of British imperialism had graduated from the educational institutions that codified sport into the public school curriculum. So when they were implementing ways in which to maintain the social hierarchy within their colonies, they instinctively used the methods that first indoctrinated them into the British social order. And for many of these inaugural scholar-athletes, organized sports

---

[45] Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, 9.

[46] Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 4 (1988), 650.

[47] Ibid.

were a large part of the indoctrination process. As Stoddart states, "By playing team sports, participants were thought to learn teamwork, the value of obeying constituted authority, courage in the face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and respect for the rules."[48]

For many colonial governors, the most important sport for sustaining social order in their colonies was cricket. One such leader, Lord Harris, the governor of Bombay, believed Indians would be "ready for some political responsibility when they had assimilated the playing and behavioral codes of cricket."[49] The British author Cecil Headlam, after a visit to India, remarked that "Cricket unites...the ruler and the ruled. It also provides a moral training, an education in pluck, and nerve, and self-restraint, far more valuable to the character of the ordinary native than the mere learning by heart of a play of Shakespeare."[50] By 1926, the participating members in the International Cricket council, the British governing body of professional cricket, were Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and India—all commonwealths of Britain. As J.A. Mangan states in his book, *The Game Is Played by Decent Chaps: the Games Ethic and Imperialism*, "Cricket was the umbilical cord of Empire linking the mother country with her children."[51]

Cricket and other organized sports were also introduced into schools in the British colonies as "socializing and civilizing agent[s]."[52] As historian Keith Sandiford wrote, "In those days the schools were dominated by headmasters who had come from Victorian Britain steeped

---

[48]Ibid, 653.

[49] Ibid, 658.

[50] Jason Kaufman and Orlando Patterson "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket" *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 1 (2005), 92.

[51] J. A. Mangan, *The Game Is Played by Decent Chaps: the Games Ethic and Imperialism* (London: Viking, 1985), 153.

[52] Kaufman and Patterson "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket," 92.

in the public school ethos which then placed great store in team sports."[53] Part of this 'ethos' was the class distinctions that were made clear within the conduct of the game. The position of umpire, and the two most favorable positions in the game, the batsmen and the captain, were almost exclusively held by the British elite.[54] Also, just like in the early years of professional football in England, the amateur player was usually from the upper class while the professional was often of a lower stature. This meant that the professional, "independent of relativities of age and skill, [must] call amateurs, 'Sir,' and, particularly when young, perform menial duties around the grounds."[55] This rigid class structure imposed through the rules of the game and the obvious ties to the British Empire may be why cricket remained a "largely urban and upper middle-class phenomenon."[56]

The sport of polo was also carefully organized to reflect the social order. Originally played by Himalayan peasants with little regulation or rules, the British quickly adapted the game to more gentlemanly standards, creating strict rules, standard equipment, and structured fields of play. It quickly went from a game for peasants to a game fit only for the wealthy elite. Indian Princes began to spend lavishly on different players and horses in hopes that their colonizers would respect them for their "princely capacity to spend widely."[57]

The strict hegemony that these sports enforced was eventually disrupted by a phenomenon common in all competitive sports: the upset. Brian Stoddart put it this way: "One immediate problem for the imperial power was that, having encouraged the measurement of

---

[53] Keith A.P. Sandiford, "Cricket and the Victorians: A Historiographical Essay." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 9, no. 3 (1982): 421.
[54] Kaufman and Patterson, "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket," 93.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Stoddart "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire," 662.
[57] Ibid, 660.

social progress by comparing colonial against British achievements in sport, there would always come the day of a colonial victory that might be interpreted as symbolic of general parity."[58] In other words, eventually there would come a time when the colonized would become better at sports than the colonizer, and because organized sports were meant to exemplify the pinnacle of the British "moral and behavioural code," this supplanting in athletic supremacy could be taken as a supplanting in the social supremacy as well.[59] This eventually occurred in 1911 when an all-Indian soccer team defeated an all-British team for the first time in the league's history[60]. The cultural implications of this victory were enormous. A Bengali Newspaper put it this way: "It fills every Indian with pride and joy to know that rice-eating, malaria-ridden, bare footed Bengalis have got the better of beef-eating, Herculean, booted John Bull in that peculiarly English sport."[61]

As John Rosselli points out in his article "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," The British saw Indians as "unmilitary, frail, cowardly, in a word, effete soft-bodied little people."[62] The colonized Indians pursued organized sports and other elements of physical culture as "redress for what they experienced as humiliation."[63] If they could defeat the British at their own game (as they did), they could feel both physically and culturally superior.

---

[58] Ibid, 662.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 667.
[61] Ibid.
[62] John Rosselli, "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal." *Past & Present*, no. 86 (1980): 122.
[63] Ibid, 121.

VII.   *Class Conflict and the Rise of Professionalism*

This exercise of autonomy through sports was also found in the English working class at around the same time period. As athletics entered the public school curriculums of middle and upper class schools, they remained largely absent from the schools of the working class. Instead, working class children were given drills, such as rifle twirling and a limited amount of gymnastic exercises. The reason the English government gave for not funding more enriching forms of sport was that once the working class entered the workforce they wouldn't have time to enjoy such leisurely activities. As one authority figure put it, "after an early age, they have little or no time for recreation like those socially above them."[64]

There were even more conspicuous examples of the upper class barring the working class from respectable organized sports. The Amateur Athletic Club, founded in 1866, listed these qualifications for those wanting to participate in its events: "Any person who has never competed in an open competition, or for public money, or for admission money, or with professionals for a prize, public or admission money, and who has never, at any period of his life, taught or assisted in the pursuit of athletic exercises as a means of livelihood, or is a mechanic, artisan or labourer."[65] The last line is a blatant rejection of a large portion of the working class. The reason leaders of the AAC gave for this exclusion was that the mechanic, artisan, or laborer performed physical work as part of their profession, giving them an unfair advantage over the more "delicately nurtured competitors" who performed intellectual work for their livelihood.[66] This was a thinly veiled attempt at working class exclusion by the upper classes, and it didn't go unnoticed by members of the working class. In 1879 the Northern Counties Athletic Association

---

[64] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 141.
[65]Ibid, 140.
[66]Ibid, 143.

was formed with the express goal of removing the clause that prevented the working class from participating in organized amateur sports. After months of pressure and boycott, the AAC folded and was replaced by the Amateur Athletic Association in 1880, which allowed the participation of any interested party regardless of their class status or profession.[67]

But even with the social class restrictions lifted from amateur participation, the burgeoning realm of professional athletics was just beginning to take shape, revealing another fertile battleground for class conflict. A surge of popularity came to the rather new sport of organized football when the Football Association Cup was established in 1871. Although this was still considered an 'amateur' league, the increasing cost of travel and time spent practicing forced many of the working class teams of Northern England to create a clandestine form of professionalism in order to compete with the wealthier teams from London and the south.

James J. Lang, a talented Scottish footballer who was arguably the first full-time professional player, was compensated by being given absentee employment at a knife making factory owned by a committee member of the team Lang played for.[68] Players also took it upon themselves to create some sort of income from the skills they had committed years to developing. During an 1884 amateur match in Sheffield between Hallam and Wednesday, Billy Mosforth, a talented Sheffield player, asked the crowd which team he should play for. After receiving shouts of "ten bob and free drinks all week" from a Wednesday fan, Mosforth rushed into the dressing room and threw on a Wednesday jersey.[69] A gentleman from the area remarked that Mosforth's selling of his skills was an "unprincipled piece of trafficking in

---

[67] Ibid, 148.
[68] Graham Curry, "Playing for Money: James J. Lang and Emergent Soccer Professionalism in Sheffield." Soccer & Society 5, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 336–355.
[69] Ibid, 339.

professionalism."[70] This gentleman's disgust with Mosforth's actions was indicative of the upper class response to the burgeoning professionalism within organized sports.

Out of fear that the working class professionals would begin to control what originally was designed to be a gentleman's league, the FA banned professional participation in 1884. Once again, the northern teams and their working class supporters responded to this attempt at exclusion by forming their own league, the British Association. In a matter of months the FA acquiesced to the demands for sanctioning professionalism, bowing once again to the working classes' "grass-roots assertiveness."[71]

But with the success of professionalism came a rise in fanaticism, and once again the schism between the working class and the middle and upper class widened. The working class had successfully weaseled their way into a game that was initially designed to keep them out, and now that they had their rowdy stadiums and their adored star players, the upper class wanted nothing to do with football. As one commentator of the period put it, football was now an "acme of athletic horrors."[72] They had moved on to the more sophisticated sport of cricket, a game that was not marred by the bad sportsmanship of football. Even though it seemed organized football was not the great equalizer some had hoped it to be, it was still an arena for healthy class competition. As Peter Bailey put it, "There was a strong appetite for sport among English workingmen and, while they took readily to the new models, they showed in the case of football a determination to adapt them to the circumstance and needs of their own culture."[73]

---

[70] Ibid.
[71] Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 150
[72] Ibid, 151.
[73] Ibid, 153.

IX.   *Politics in Sports*

Although organized sports were growing increasingly popular among the working class as the 19th century came to a close, there was no concentrated effort made by the different socialist groups like the Independent Labour Party or the Fabian Society to utilize the concentrated power of sports to garner support for their respective causes. The reason for this is multi-faceted. For one, the leaders of these parties were first and foremost intellectuals, making it difficult for them to avoid their "rationalist, intellectualist bias" when regarding the actual value of sports.[74] George Bernard Shaw, a well-known playwright and leader of the Fabian society, saw sports in a way that was most likely reflective of most middle-class intellectual reformer. He saw them as a safety valve. He said, "It is a noteworthy fact that kicking and beating have played so considerable a part in the habits which necessity has imposed on mankind in past ages that the only way of preventing civilized men from beating and kicking their wives is to organize games in which they can kick and beat balls."[75] Intellectuals like Shaw may have seen the palliative value in sports, but they did not see it as a way to unite people around a common political cause.

This runs contrary to the politically charged organized sports leagues and competitions on the European continent. Sports leagues and groups associated with different revolutionary sentiments began to pop up in several different European countries during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The "Social Democrat-arbeiter Turner und Sports Bund" in Germany had close to one million members, and the "socialist workers sports clubs" in France had over

---

[74] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power, and Culture,* 211.
[75] Mordecai Richler, *Dispatches from the Sporting Life* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2003).

100,000 members.[76] But aside from a few minor groups and organizations, there were no concentrated efforts of mobilizing organized sports leagues to facilitate socialist or communist causes in the United Kingdom. It could be argued that the reason for this is because the British Isles were not as strongly affected by the burgeoning fascist movement occurring on the continent. Both the German and French socialist sports movements were "launched against the threat from the right."[77] Since the threat to democracy wasn't as acute in Britain, organized sports were used more to reconcile political conflicts rather than to exacerbate them.

The largest class dispute in British history, the General Strike of 1926, used organized sports as a method to ease social tensions. For nine days in May of 1926 close to two million workers went on strike to protest wage cuts for coal miners. During the course of the dispute strikers blocked trains and boats from entering or exiting different British cities. In Plymouth, the government organized a recreational soccer match between the strikers and the police officers to try to shift the public attention away from the strike itself. The game drew a crowd of 10,000, and the strikers bested the guards 2 to 1.[78] Even though this was a rather unique event that didn't occur elsewhere during the strike, it is evidence of the myriad ways in which sports are used in social class dynamics.

X.   *Conclusion: The Social Supremacy of Sports*

As the 20th century progressed, organized sports continued to be one of the many battle grounds the social classes of Britain used to express their autonomy and influence. Participation and interest in sports broadened dramatically, leading social historian John Hargreaves to make

---

[76] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power, and Culture,* 211.
[77] Ibid.
[78] J. A. Sharpe, *A Fiery & Furious People: a History of Violence in England* (London: Arrow Books, 2018), 556.

this bold assertion: "more than any other component of the national popular culture, sports have come to symbolize a national way of life…"[79] But this way of life was not uniform, and sports continued to symbolize different things for different people, fracturing along divergent lines of race, gender, nationality, and of course, social class. As with any social activity granted power and visibility by all levels of a society, organized sports continued to be both liberating and oppressing. This was clear even during the Tudor Era when the young men of Ashbourne met to play the rudimentary game of street football. Teams were chosen based on where you lived in the town. One side was called 'upstreeters,' the other 'downstreeters,' reflecting both class and regional divides within the community.[80]

In the end, a careful study of 19th century British leisure history doesn't offer clear-cut answers to such questions as: Do organized sports unite or divide the social classes? Are they the panacea of the proletariat or the engine of the bourgeois? But this doesn't mean that definitive conclusions can't be drawn from the information collected above. As famed British social historian E.P. Thompson stated when discussing the possibility of class-consciousness, "The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context."[81] In other words, the answer to these questions is: it all depends on the context. In some cases, the upper classes used sports to tighten their control. In other cases, the lower classes used sports to assert their independence. What's clear is that within the early British industrial period, the playing fields acted as one of the many battlegrounds in which the rapidly changing social classes tried to exert their authority. They remain battlegrounds to this day, and neither side—the owner of the worker—seem willing to give an inch.

---

[79] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power, and Culture,* 220.
[80] Hole, *English Sports and Pastimes, 50-51*.
[81] Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963), 9.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Arnold, Matthew, and Stefan Collini. *Culture and Anarchy: and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010 (Originally published in 1869).

Arnold, Thomas, and Thomas William. Bamford. *Thomas Arnold on Education: a Selection from His Writings*. London: Cambridge U.P, 1970.

Heywood, Benjamin. *Address Delivered at the Manchester Mechanics Institution*. Manchester: Charles Knight and co., 1843.

Lynd, Robert. *Passion of Labour*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1920.

Nordau, Max Simon. *The Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*. Chicago,: Laird & Lee, 1895.

Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*. London: George Woodfall, 1851.

Place, Francis. *Improvement of the Working People: Drunkenness--Education*. London: C. Fox, 1834.

Ruskin, John. *Time and Tide*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923.

Spencer, Herbert. *Facts and Comments*. London: D Appleton and Company, 1902.

Strutt, Joseph. *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*. London: Reeves, 1801.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Patricia J. *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

Bailey, Peter. *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*. London: Routledge, 2010.

—. *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image: a Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Atheneum, 1977.

Briggs, Asa. *Mass Entertainment: the Origins of a Modern Industry*. Adelaide: Griffin Press, 1960.

Budd, Michael Anton. *Heroic Bodies: Physical Culture Commerce and the Promise of the Perfected Self, 1898-1918*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1995.

Campbell, James D. *The Army Isnt All Work: Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860-1920*. ,: Routledge, 2017.

Chapman, David L. *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006

Cieplik, Raymond. *Physical Work and Amusements as Concerns of the Young Mens Christian Association, 1851-1884*. Eugene: University of Oregon, 1970.

Cunningham, Hugh. *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1980.

Curry, Graham. "Playing for Money: James J. Lang and Emergent Soccer Professionalism in Sheffield." Soccer & Society 5, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 336–355. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1466097042000279599.

Deslandes, Paul R. ""The Foreign Element": Newcomers and the Rhetoric of Race, Nation, and Empire in "Oxbridge" Undergraduate Culture, 1850-1920." *Journal of British Studies* 37, no. 1 (1998): 54-90. Accessed March 11, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/176035
Fraser, W. Hamish. *The Coming of the Mass Market: 1850-1914*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1981.

Donaldson, Peter. "'We Are Having a Very Enjoyable Game': Britain, Sport and the South African War, 1899–1902." *War in History* 25, no. 1 (January 2018): 4–25.

Hammerton, A. James. "Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1920." *Journal of British Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 291-321. Accessed February 17, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/176058.

Hargreaves, John. *Sport, Power and Culture: a Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

Hartmann-Tews, Ilse. 1999. "The Idea of Sport for All and the Development of Organised Sport in Germany and Great Britain." *Journal of European Area Studies* 7 (2): 145. doi:10.1080/02613539908455854.

Hole, Christina. *English Sports and Pastimes*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1949.

Kaufman, Jason, and Orlando Patterson. "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket." *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 1 (2005): 82-110. Accessed March 11, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/4145351.

Mandle, W. F. "Games People Played: Cricket and Football in England and Victoria in the Late Nineteenth Century∗." *Historical Studies* 15, no. 60 (1973): 511–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/10314617308595487.

Mangan, J. A. *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*. London: Falmer Press, 1986.

——. *The Game Is Played by Decent Chaps: the Games Ethic and Imperialism*. London: Viking, 1985.

Mangan, J. A., and James Walvin. *Manliness and Morality : Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

McCrone, Kathleen E. "Play Up! Play Up! and Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public School." *Journal of British Studies* 23, no. 2 (1984): 106-34. Accessed March 11, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/175429.

Richler, Mordecai. *Dispatches from the Sporting Life*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2003.

Rosselli, John. "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal." *Past & Present*, no. 86 (1980): 121-48. Accessed April 6, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/650742.

Sandiford, Keith A.P. "Cricket and the Victorians: A Historiographical Essay." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 9, no. 3 (1982): 421-36. Accessed April 1, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41298796.

——. *Cricket Nurseries of Colonial Barbados: the Elite Schools, 1865-1966*. Kingston, Jamaica: Press University of the West Indies, 1998.

Sharpe, J. A. *A Fiery & Furious People: a History of Violence in England*. London: Arrow Books, 2018, page 556.

Semmel, Bernard. *Imperialism and Social Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Stoddart, Brian. "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 4 (1988): 649-73. Accessed April 1, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/178928.

Tennyson, Charles. "THEY TAUGHT THE WORLD TO PLAY." *Victorian Studies* 2, no. 3 (March 1, 1959): 211–222. http://search.proquest.com/docview/1304759490/.

Thomis, Malcolm I. *The Luddites: Machine-Breaking in Regency England*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Gregg Revivals, 1993.

Thompson, Dorothy. *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Thompson, Edward Palmer. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963.

—. "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture." *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (January 1974): 382–405. https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh/7.4.382.