

Figure 1. James Cullinane, *Stadium*, collage study, 2004

Editors' Introduction

Historicizing the Politics and Pleasure of Sport

The making of global culture owes much to sport. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, the Olympic Games, and other major sporting events generate huge revenues, fill stadiums, attract billions of viewers, and bring entire nations to a standstill. Athletes like Lionel Messi, Usain Bolt, Virat Kohli, and Serena Williams and teams including Manchester United, Real Madrid, and the New York Yankees have legions of loyal followers on every continent, from cosmopolitan megacities to remote rural villages. The quasi-universal popularity of sports may be a relatively recent development, but its transnational nature is not. The global diffusion of modern sports began with the imperial and commercial expansion of Western Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century. Agents of that imperialism—missionaries, teachers, traders, and colonial officials—believed sport to be an important part of their civilizing mission among the so-called darker nations of the world.¹ Military interventions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America fueled the popularity of Western sports, especially when accompanied by “soft power” cultural programs and private business ventures.

And yet the historical record shows that local athletes and spectators of all classes, from Bombay and Cape Town to Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City, often enjoyed the imported games on their own terms; they were not simply duped by outsiders. This issue of *Radical History Review* explores the politics and pleasure of sports in multiple countries and eras. Collectively, the contributions to this project point to a paradox in sports: they simultaneously empowered and disempowered, included and excluded, united and divided, oppressed and liberated. By the end of World War II, soccer, cricket, athletics, boxing, and other sports reached enormous popularity. Sporting clubs and events provided spaces for fun, freedom, solidarity,

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and resistance, while they also reproduced class privilege, patriarchy, and racism. The performance of masculinities and femininities, the creation of ideal body types, and the ongoing marginalization of women in sport illustrate these tensions. In the stands, clubhouses, workplaces, and newspapers, sport became a form of national culture that shaped, and was shaped by, racial, ethnic, class, gender, and generational dynamics and hierarchies. By the late twentieth century, sport was firmly enmeshed in, and at times drove, new global capitalist networks that comprised sport institutions (such as FIFA, the International Olympic Committee, and the International Cricket Council), multinational corporations, satellite and Internet media, and migrant athletes and coaches.²

In an effort to press popular culture into the service of Marxist revolution, Bertolt Brecht wrote, “we pin our hopes to the sporting public.”³ Brecht hoped that the intimate connections between audience and performance in sport could serve as a model for radical theater. Many social critics and academics disagreed, insisting that sport distracted fans from politics and ingratiated capitalist values into popular culture. The schemes of American and European industrialists to use sport to discipline workers and instill Taylorist time management systems buttressed this view. Moreover, many dismissed sport as a site for political mobilization because they understood the competitive nature of sport to be incompatible with class solidarity. Skepticism notwithstanding, recent historical research has demonstrated that sport clubs provided vehicles for the integration of marginalized groups into politics and national pantheons of heroes.⁴

The relationship of political movements to sport has influenced its place within historical scholarship. C. L. R. James, the Trinidadian radical intellectual, and many of the pioneering scholars in the field participated in anticolonial, feminist, and antiwar movements of the mid-twentieth century. These experiences shaped their understanding of the possibility for social change within sport.⁵ Many social and political histories of sport since the 1970s analyzed both transformative resistance and accommodative opposition that sit at the intersection of pleasure and politics. While deeply informed by history, these scholars rarely conformed to strict disciplinary categories. Their historical research helped denaturalize categories like race and gender, upon which modern social hierarchies were built. Historians interested in identity construction also analyzed sport as an organizing principle of civic associations, urban planning, globalization, and mass media. This work demonstrated the value of studying sport to explore changes in everyday life across social classes, genders, national borders, and ethnicities. Historians of sport are also uniquely positioned to analyze the changes in body aesthetics, movement, and relationships between bodies. Whether veiled through rendition or in plain sight, the body is at the center of state policy in the twenty-first century.⁶

The rise of social and women’s history and cultural studies and the growth of interdisciplinary programs facilitated the consolidation of sport history as a

legitimate topic of scholarly research. In doing so, scholarship on sport adopted a broad conceptualization of “the political” as a terrain of struggle between individuals, groups, companies, or nations attempting to impose their will over another. To understand this complex past, historians have been adventurous with their sources and methodologies. Studies of sport rarely can rely on government documents or formal organizations’ political records. More frequently, researchers have trawled newspaper and magazine collections and club and private (including personal) archives. Scholars of the global South, in particular, have creatively used sources, including oral histories, photographs, film footage, and survey data to document key aspects of the sporting past.

The articles in this issue also mine a wealth of written, oral, and material sources and deploy a wide range of methodological approaches. The authors piece together changing relationships between athletic pleasure and politics across time and space through a variety of approaches: discursive analyses of racial and national identities in sport media; an examination of economic data to understand the consequences of publicly funded stadium construction; and social histories of masculinity and femininity at the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and labor studies.

The enduring interest among historians of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in questions of political economy and the nation-state may explain why so much enterprising research involving sports focuses on both the struggles of working-class men and communities, using sport as a tool of political integration and social solidarity, and the state’s reactions to those efforts.⁷ In nineteenth-century Mexico, the state hardly controlled the public sphere. As David C. LaFevor explains in his article included here, “Illegal boxing matches challenged the ability of the government to regulate public spectacle, and they undermined the elite’s prerogative to define permissible behaviors.” The popularity of boxing matches among the urban poor complicated elite efforts to restrict them. Likewise, the popular passion for soccer empowered club directors in colonial Africa. Hikabwa D. Chipande’s article on football and social change on the Zambian Copperbelt examines teams, leagues, and recreational facilities as spaces of struggle between black miners, white mine managers, and British colonial authorities. Through their participation in football, many working-class men in Zambia also developed political skills, connected with local activists, and acquired social honor and respectability.

As much as capitalists and military leaders hoped to mold the masses through sport, hinging the weighty political project of nationalism upon games with uncontrollable outcomes has proved a liability for politicians.⁸ Jeffrey Richey’s article explores one such case, whereby Argentine sportswriters undermined the diplomatic projects by portraying Brazilian soccer players as monkeys (*macaquitos*). In the 1920s, sportswriters became popular enough to challenge national political leaders and create scandals. The story of the *macaquitos* affair cautions us to question contemporary mythologies. Given the popular understanding of soccer in

Latin America, one might assume that the Brazilian team was of African descent and that the Argentine government would have supported antagonistic portrayals of their neighbors. However, neither was the case. At that same moment, the Argentine boxer Luis Firpo defied racial categorization in the United States. Brian D. Bunk shows how Firpo could incite racist discussions without posing the same threat as black contenders.

Alan McDougall's study of East German football demonstrates that a history of sports clubs enriches our understanding of daily life under authoritarian governments. Football clubs, largely working-class, created a modicum of independence from the German Democratic Republic's propaganda.⁹ Factory football clubs' participation in antigovernment actions in the 1950s reflected the importance of sport in the construction of class identity. Women's football putatively embodied the gender equality that the state hoped to promote. However, deep-seated patriarchal practices in East German society created obstacles for female athletes seeking to develop their clubs.

Scholarship on sport opens new avenues for the examination of supposedly natural categories of difference, such as gender. Historians have long recognized gender as socially constructed. Moreover, gender relations have been central to the formation of identities and political power. The study of gender, which originated with the historiography of women, has resulted, ironically, in privileging research on masculinity. The fact that women's history remains rather understudied complicates attempts to make arguments about the role of gender ideologies in everyday life.

Women's historical exclusion from sport has denied them opportunities to acquire the skills and cultural capital afforded to male participants. Contemporary philosophers, the United Nations, and human rights organizations contend that women's athletics contribute to several pillars of human development, including health, conflict resolution, bodily integrity, and play.¹⁰ However, very little historical research exists on social conditions that facilitate women's participation. Even fewer studies inquire into the broader significance of this participation. What we do know is that women have challenged their exclusion from sport since the nineteenth century. Before the institutionalization of sports in clubs and associations, women's participation varied widely. For example, in the 1890s women's baseball teams traveled between Cuba and the United States.¹¹ The historian Louis A. Pérez Jr. found that women's early attendance at baseball games created possibilities for their participation in the public sphere. By the turn of the twentieth century, physical education fit into broader educational reforms, frequently connected to eugenics and efforts to improve "racial health."

Amira Rose Davis's contribution builds on and extends a rich and growing literature on female athletes' participation in sport.¹² Her highly original research shows that African American women were an important part of the post-Civil War baseball tradition in the United States. Connie Morgan and other women became

household names and buoyed the Negro Leagues, which suffered a players' exodus to Major League Baseball in the years following the Brooklyn Dodgers' signing of Jackie Robinson. Despite their importance to ticket sales, the African American media frequently criticized women players for depreciating black baseball. Thus Davis's analysis brings into sharp relief the importance of understanding the intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, class, and nation.

By the 1960s, women's athletics made great strides, particularly through their expanded access to higher education. In the United States this culminated in the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which mandated equal funding for men's and women's sports in educational institutions receiving federal funds. This legislation offered unprecedented resources for the development of women's athletics.¹³ Benefiting from two generations of physical education and association activity, women's sport has felt the impact of Title IX internationally. Indeed, many of the Latin American players and some of the African players in the 2015 Women's World Cup played for universities in the United States at some point in their careers. Still, most of the world's athletes cannot expect to attend these institutions, and very few universities in the global South have comparable resources for athletics.

The increase in women's participation in organized sport, as fans, players, and administrators, confounded the typical media narratives surrounding sport on a global scale.¹⁴ Commonly, femininity was portrayed as weakness, dependency, and ineptitude. Instead, women's athletic performances show female bodies characterized by their freedom of movement, sweat, strength, and fatigue. Sportswriters are not alone in their struggle to find the language to describe women athletes' accomplishments. Although contemporary art on sport rarely features women, some visual artists have successfully reconfigured and rethought gendered conventions. Jennifer Doyle's essay examines *Match* by artist Jennifer Locke, whose work "forces us to consider the depth of the prohibition against direct physical competition between men and women." Doyle suggests that we can read the struggle between Locke and her male opponent as a form of mentorship and collaboration—just as we would understand a match between male athletes.

Politics today have developed an ever-closer relationship to popular culture. Historians are well positioned to ask, What are the challenges and opportunities of political action arising from the cultural sphere? As the pieces by Thomas P. Oates and Steven W. Thrasher note, well-known athletes' support for the Black Lives Matter movement raised awareness of police brutality toward African Americans among fans. Both articles, however, emphasize how the sport industry tends to exploit African Americans, at both the professional and collegiate levels. Many historians of sport have brought concerns with social justice into their teaching practices. The participants in this issue's teaching forum reflect on how training as historians and research in sport can come together in the classroom and help students better

understand the relationship between sport and politics. These connections are also highlighted in reviews by Glen Thompson and Daniel Widener of recent histories of water sports and European football.

This journal issue appears on the eve of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which are estimated to cost at least \$16 billion in public funds. The country's hosting of the 2014 World Cup sparked criticism of mega-events and merged with massive street demonstrations for a range of social justice causes, thereby highlighting the unusual capacity of sport both to crystallize inequalities and to trigger civic activism. "We want FIFA-quality schools and hospitals," chanted the huge crowds on June 20, 2013, the same day that the world body announced the tournament's official champagne brand. Organizers and boosters of the World Cup, the Olympics, and US major leagues use sport to promote specific kinds of urban restructuring, spend exorbitant public funds for private gain, and curtail civil liberties through militarized security arrangements.¹⁵ Sean Dinces's article superbly demonstrates how the relationship between politics and sport in Chicago prompted new financing schemes to build an expensive new indoor arena. These arrangements between billion-dollar sports franchises and cash-strapped local governments have resulted in massive privatization of public resources. This link between modern sport, urban development, and state subsidies has a long history that goes back at least to stadium construction at the beginning of the twentieth century. There are also historical cases where such sporting events sparked public discussion of populism and resulted in protests against expensive construction projects.¹⁶ Historical research enriches these ongoing debates.

Boxing and soccer are well represented in this issue, but omissions also point to serious gaps in the literature. Despite considerable editorial effort to cover a diversity of themes and geographic regions, we had great difficulty in procuring articles focused, for example, on sexuality, disability, and Asian societies. We had hoped to publish essays on aspects of South Asian cricket, the only international sport dominated on the pitch and in the boardroom by nations of the global South, as well as on Japanese, Korean, or Taiwanese baseball and China's "Ping-Pong" diplomacy.¹⁷ Perhaps the dearth of scholarship in these areas reflects the varied priorities and disciplinary categorizations in regions where sport history research is not fully accepted as legitimate academic work. We also aspired to feature research from earlier periods, especially considering the role of organized sport in modernization processes designed to eliminate dangerous leisure activities.¹⁸ However, the Western origins of modern sport have limited the geographic and temporal scope of historical research.¹⁹ These limitations notwithstanding, the rich, interdisciplinary scholarship on pleasure and politics featured in this issue shows how and why histories of sport embedded in the debates and epistemologies of "mainstream" fields can enhance historical production on vital topics and themes.²⁰

—Peter Alegi and Brenda Elsey

Notes

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2. See Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 2002); Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams: How Baseball Linked the United States and Japan in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and John Bale and Joseph Maguire, eds., *The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World* (London: Cass, 1994).
3. Bertolt Brecht, "Emphasis on Sport," in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, comp. Stephen Duncombe (New York: Verso, 2002), 183.
4. See, e.g., Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Ramachandra Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport* (London: Picador, 2002); Peter Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, Politics, and Society in South Africa* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004); Charles Korr, *West Ham United: The Making of a Football Club* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
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7. Alegi, *Laduma!*; Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen*; Roger Kittleson, *The Country of Football: Soccer and the Making of Modern Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Robert Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Workers' State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).
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 18. Among others, see Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Timothy Mitchell, *Blood Sport: A Social History of Spanish Bullfighting* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and

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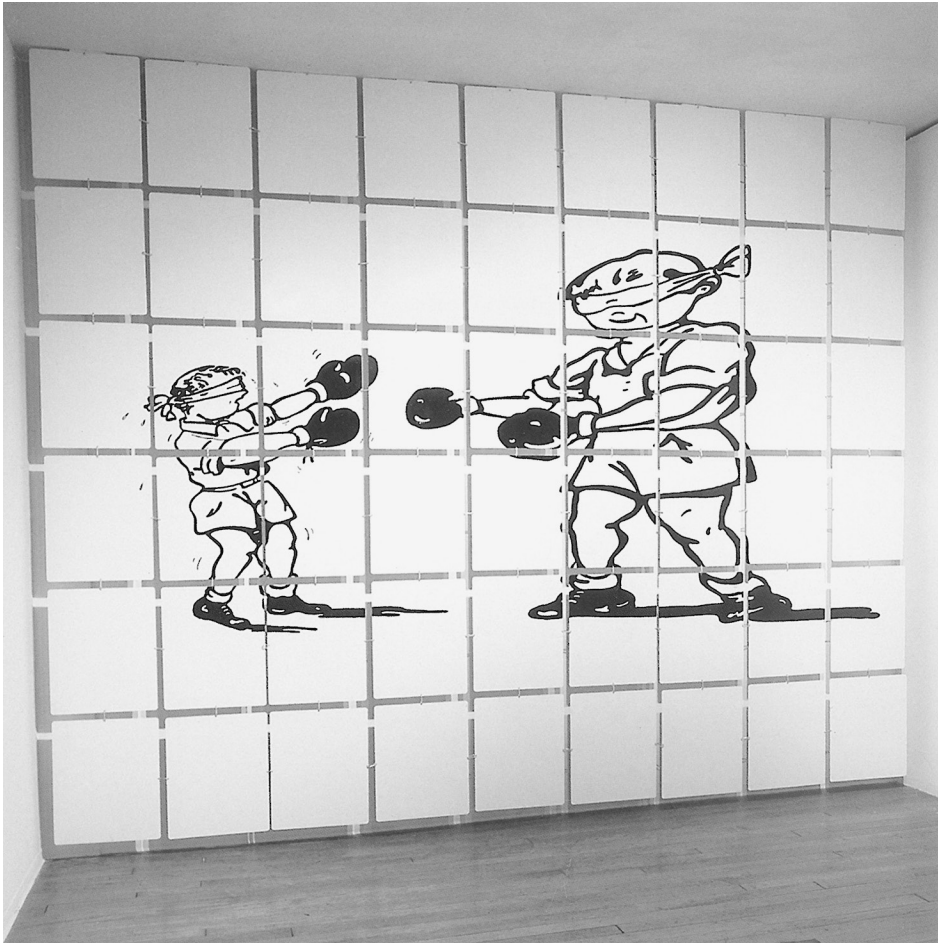


Figure 2. James Cullinane, *Grid for Sonny Liston*, installation, 2004