Getting into the Game: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport—Introduction

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Keywords: sports, games, play, body, performance, aesthetics

Conceptual walls that once cloistered scholars from even contemplating that games and sports might be legitimate and significant matters for intellectual inquiry have in recent years been intrepidly scaled. Political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, literary critics, historians, geographers, economists and philosophers have mounted inquiries into sundry aspects of sport participation and spectatorship, past and present. Anthropologists too have been tempted to rethink their disciplinary habit of steering clear of the study of games and sports and to speculate concerning the intellectual challenges that may be embraced within previously forbidden fields of play. Ethnographers who venture into arenas of sport may risk incurring larger or smaller measures of professional indifference or prejudice, but they also tend to return with vivid accounts and intriguing theoretical insights.

Sources of the lingering anthropological reluctance to afford games and sports serious and sustained attention have been probed in various writings (e.g., Archetti, 1998; Bourdieu, 1990; Dyck, 2000b) and are subjected to further critical analysis by King in this issue. What also needs to be noted here is the ethnographic breadth and analytical depth of a nascent and pulsing anthropological literature on sport. In fact, ethnographic fieldworkers have been intermittently reporting the popularity of games and sports of many types since the founding of the discipline in the 19th century. James Mooney published an article on the Cherokee ball game (1890) in the same year that he conducted research into the Ghost Dance religion. Shortly after this came Culin's (1907) comprehensive study of the morphology and religious significance of the games of North American Indians. Additional accounts of the traditional games and athletic contests of the Americas have been issued in the last two decades (Nabokov, 1987; Oxendine, 1988; Scarborough and Wilcox, 1991; Veenum, 1994). At various times eminent anthropologists have matter of factly identified sport practices as salient features of their investigations (i.e., Appadurai, 1995; Firth 1931; Fox 1961; Geertz 1972; Gluckman and Guck-

man, 1977; MacAloon, 1981). Paradoxically, although several generations of undergraduate anthropology students were introduced to the filmed intricacies of Trobriand cricket while their teachers puzzled over the implications of the Balinese cock fight, the notion that games and sports might comprise appropriate objects of systematic and comparative anthropological investigation tended to be smothered by a preference for exoticism.

Since the 1980s, however, a set of finely crafted anthropological monographs that explicitly target the study of specific sports in particular settings has appeared. It includes works on masculinity, ideology and wrestling in India (Alter, 1992), sports in the moral order of the Peoples' Republic of China (Brownell, 1995), baseball on the border between Mexico and Texas (Klein, 1997) and of football (i.e., soccer) cultures worldwide (Archetti, 1999; Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1997; Armstrong, 1998). These and other ethnographies have been supplemented by a revised introductory text (Blanchard, 1995) and edited volumes that examine a broad range of fieldwork settings and theoretical concerns pertinent to the anthropology of sport (Dyck, 2000a; MacClancy, 1996; Sands, 1999). In conjunction with these developments a distinctively anthropological literature on children's involvement in sport has materialized (Anderson, 2001, 2003; Beyer Broch, 2003; Dyck, 1995, 2000c, 2000d, 2003; Lithman, 2000; Weiss, 2000). The anthropology of sport now boasts a small but rapidly growing literature that suffices to demonstrate the potential of both what the study of sport has to offer to anthropology and what, in turn, anthropology can reveal about sport as a facet of social life.

What await anthropologists who choose to look into the sporting pastimes so enthusiastically partaken of by people within our fieldwork locales are familiar components of ethnographic inquiry. We can expect to encounter activities, relationships and events ensconced within shared or conflicting purposes, meanings and imaginaries that yield varied types of experiences, outcomes and identities. Clearly, the ethnographic study of sport proceeds in the same manner that anthropologists explore other facets of social life. What is, nonetheless, distinctive about sport ensues from its stunning capacity to generate pleasure, passion and prodigious levels of social investment and personal commitment to given games, athletic competitions and sporting events. Although games and sports are ubiquitous in the contemporary world, they stand categorically and experientially apart from the mundane routines of everyday life. Elements of play that remain pivotal to sport furnish athletes and spectators with numerous and compelling forms of engagement. There is, thus, no end of ethnographic opportunities to scrutinize why and how sport takes such a persuasive grip on its aficionados or to elucidate the ways in which it may be wielded as an instrument for mediating and reshaping social, personal and political arrangements.

Depending upon one's theoretical inclinations, the anthropological study of games and sports can be approached from any number of directions. For instance, Victor Turner's observation that "the way people play perhaps is more revealing of a culture than how they work" (1983: 104) pointed to the dramatic, expressive and anti-structural properties of sport. Turner identified games, sports and festivals as modes of play that are intrinsically reflexive, serving as both their own subject and object (ibid.: 105). Anchoring his speculations within Roger Caillois' general theory of play (1979), Turner too connected childhood play and simple, unregulated forms of racing and wrestling to highly organized sport activities such as boxing, billiards, baseball and the Olympic Games.

Moving beyond *agon*, or the competitive dimension of sport, Turner underscored the significance of *mimicry*, through which "one can become an imaginary character oneself, a subject who makes believe or makes others believe that he/she is someone other than him/herself" (ibid.: 108). Turner agreed with Caillois that while the athletes who compete in a sports contest are dominated by *agon*, members of the audience at a sporting event are under the spell of *mimicry*. He further endorsed Caillois' contention that:

> [a] physical contagion leads them to assume the position of the contestants in order to help them, just as the bowler is known to unconsciously incline his body in the direction that he would like the bowling ball to take at the end of its course. Under these conditions, paralleling the spectacle, a competitive mimicry is born in the public, which doubles the agon of the field or track." (1979: 22)

This configuration, noted Turner, can be readily seen in the crowd at a football or baseball game (1983: 108). We might add that the agonistic and the mimetic intertwine in myriad ways wherever games and sports are played, thereby providing ethnographers with absorbing lines of inquiry to pursue.

Alternatively, one might focus upon embodied dimensions of sport that reprise propositions and concerns enunciated by Marcel Mauss (1973) in his seminal essay on techniques of the body. He portrayed the body as:

> ...man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first

> and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body. (Mauss, 1973: 75)

Identifying the body as a social as well as a psychological and biological phenomenon, Mauss nominated education (or training) as being dominant among all elements of what he termed the art of using the human body. The training procedures human beings apply to animals, reported Mauss, they voluntarily apply to themselves and their children. Whether imitating the body techniques of those who are admired or who have authority over one, the individual borrows a series of movements or ways of using the body that constitute it from the action executed in front of him/her or with him/her by others (ibid.: 73). Summing up the social dimensions exhibited by different styles of walking, Mauss concluded that there was perhaps no "natural" way for an adult to walk, but only one or another socially mediated and transmitted form of perambulation.

Mauss' inclusion of running, swimming and games as appropriate and significant matters for social analysis forsook stances that would sideline these as trivial matters. He also bequeathed to those curious about the social workings and salience of body techniques an analytical scheme within which ethnographic observations about the differing ways in which people use their bodies might be linked analytically to larger social processes and purposes. Regimes of physical training to which child, youth and adult athletes are routinely subjected, either voluntarily or with some degree of coercion, tend to be overlooked or taken for granted. Nevertheless, such programs of instruction and discipline offer ethnographers a promising vantage point from which to survey the ways in which games and sports enlist and entrain bodies for athletic performance as well as other purposes. Acknowledgement of the embodied nature of sport also brings to the fore aesthetic considerations and recognition of how performing bodies may serve to express all manner of attitudes and dispositions.

Other approaches to the study of games and sports might emphasize their potential to observe, redraw or transcend ethnic, class or gender boundaries in everyday life (Dyck, 2000b). The complex relations and meanings that emerge between particular athletic competitors or teams, events and audiences oblige those who study these to take appropriate account of the larger contexts within which games and sports are enacted and consumed (e.g., Springwood, 2000). To grasp how given sport practices speak, or can be made to speak, to larger issues it is necessary to conjoin fine-grained ethnographic observations of action within arenas of play to a politically and economically informed appreciation of forces and factors beyond the playing field. The intricate and shifting dynamics between the local and the global, the colonial and the postcolonial can be graphically illustrated through the examination of sport as is evidenced in Klein's (1991) account of baseball in the Dominican Republic and Appadurai's (1995) analysis of the meaning of cricket in contemporary India. Ethnographies of sport can also usefully delve into the organizational capacities and instrumental purposes that underpin the sponsoring of games and sports, be these professional or amateur in nature, formal or informal in constitution (e.g., Alter, 2000; Azoy, 1982; Frankenberg, 1957).

The investigative tools that anthropologists can bring to bear upon these or other approaches to sport reflect the traditional strengths of the discipline. Ethnography, both as a mode of inquiry as well as a means for reporting findings, provides a powerful medium for taking account of both the structural arrangements and personal experiences so central to sport. Moreover, anthropological ways of dealing with ritual, symbolic analysis, social drama and communitas can be employed with considerable effect to capture and explain aspects of embodied and verbal behaviour by athletes and spectators. Similarly, an ethnographically informed appreciation of aesthetics, morality and narrative can help to calibrate the ways in which fans and players seek to understand the nature of given games and sports and of their involvement in these. The abiding anthropological concern to locate and contextualize specific relationships and activities that we examine in terms of larger issues and factors allows ethnographers to draw analytical connections between arenas of play and arenas of power. Finally, the anthropological penchant for courting comparisons between widely separated settings and seemingly disparate or similar activities can produce unexpected insights. For example, the articles by Moore and Anderson in this issue trace the organization and significance of a single sport, football, in two different countries—respectively, Australia and South Africa. When read together they establish just how dissimilar can be the ambience and outcomes of the same sport when it is fused with national political purposes in two such differing settings.

There are further implications for anthropology in taking up the study of sport that need to be specified. Proceeding wholeheartedly into this area of inquiry necessitates the granting of suitable recognition of work conducted by practitioners of other disciplines whose interests in sport may overlap but not exactly correspond with our own (see Moore and Lithman, this issue). We can, indeed, gain much from the approaches established in other dis-

ciplines as well as from interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary discussions now emanating from a broadly defined field of sport studies. As Moore (this issue) notes, this is hardly a new or untested feature of anthropological practice. At the same time, it is incumbent on ethnographers of sport to continue articulating their inquiries and findings to broader theoretical and substantive concerns within anthropology (Brownell, 2000) lest they lose touch with more general developments within the discipline. Yet this obligation must be counterbalanced by an ontological acceptance of the need to see games and sports not simply as epiphenomena or indicators of other social concerns, but as complex and significant activities in their own right (Lithman, this issue).

Another implication of investigating, writing and teaching about sport is the likelihood that these undertakings will attract more diverse audiences and non-anthropological lines of interrogation than we may be used to juggling. Moore (this issue) reports the enthusiasm with which undergraduate and graduate students respond to ethnographic works on sport, wherever these might be located, and the ways in which many students are inspired to compare and contrast their personal experiences of sport involvement with those that they read about. Anthropologists have long claimed that ethnography comprises a penetrating and effective vehicle for reflecting upon one's own experience by reaching out to understand less familiar forms of social and cultural life. In view of the relative accessibility associated with ethnographic writings, we should anticipate a careful reading of our accounts by scholars from other disciplines as well as by more than a few non-academics.

Ideally, this will inspire productive circumstances for transgressing and extending the boundaries of anthropology as well as conventional Western definitions of what is and isn't sport. Some sociological treatments of sport are inextricably linked to conventional assumptions of modernity and structural determination that cannot readily accept either indigenous athletic contests (e.g., Mentore, 2000) or today's "extreme" sports as being commensurable with organized team sports (including cricket, football, rugby, baseball, basketball and hockey) that developed in Europe or North America during the 19th century. The prospects of comparing not only temporally, geographically and culturally diverse athletic pastimes but also, for instance, sport and dance as embodied performance activities (e.g., Archetti, 1999; Dyck and Archetti, 2003) are more likely and welcome within anthropology than in other disciplinary realms. In consequence, anthropological approaches are better suited than others to take account of aesthetic and moral dimensions of sport and to trace how these considerations enter into the fashioning of selves by individual athletes and sport enthusiasts as well as by collectivities and situational communities convened by sports events.

The articles in this issue ensue from anthropological field research conducted in the United States, Australia, Sweden and South Africa. Based on papers originally prepared for a session held at the 2001 Meetings of the Canadian Anthropology Society and the American Ethnology Society, they comprise a cumulative invitation to venture into the anthropology of sport. King examines the predicaments and possibilities of an anthropology of sport through a discussion of the Native American mascot issue in professional and collegiate sports. While the use of pseudo-Indian symbols in sport has been formally condemned by the American Anthropological Association as well as by Native American organizations, King reports a systematic unwillingness within the anthropological community in the United States to grant intellectual attention to either this particular matter or the study of sport in general. King's identification of the biases and barriers that function to discourage American anthropologists from taking sport seriously raises fundamental questions about not only the policing of the substantive boundaries of the discipline but also the analytical limitations and institutional losses to anthropology occasioned by this prejudice.

Moore's article situates the anthropology of sport within the active and eclectic multidisciplinary field of sport studies. His contention that the potential of ethnographic investigations of sport depends upon the preparedness of anthropologists to articulate their studies with or at least take appropriate account of work conducted elsewhere in the field of sport studies touches upon more fundamental and abiding concerns within current anthropological practice. Moore's brief account of his research on soccer in Western Australia illustrates the ways in which local social and academic conditions shape anthropological work. Finally, he makes an invaluable point in noting that the teaching of the anthropology of sport can provide an attractive, accessible and effective way of introducing students to anthropology.

Lithman conducts a wide-ranging assessment of the premise and value of anthropological contributions to sport gleaned through research conducted "at home." He also specifies several methodological and theoretical refinements that anthropologists might adopt to deal appositely with the social and cultural dynamics of an industrial, urban and Western society such as Sweden. Lithman characterizes anthropology as a discipline well suited to capitalize upon an essential "wonderment" about

how society is constituted. This capacity equips ethnographers with a powerful tool for delineating the ways in which participation in sport becomes a key feature of countless contemporary lives. Anthropology is enabled to maintain this wonderment, argues Lithman, because it is far less implicated than other disciplines in guiding the management of the contemporary world.

Anderson's article on football in the "old" and "new" South Africa highlights the manner in which sport was traditionally employed as an instrument for marking and maintaining the racial and political boundaries of *apartheid*. Her account shows how the previous regime of white rule in South Africa was both celebrated and challenged through participation in international sport. But just as difference and inequality were once constructed through sport, today South Africa is experimenting with football stadiums as sites for producing shared and pleasurable experiences of (and hopefully more lasting forms of commitment to) similarity and equality. The image of a nation playing itself into oneness offers poignant testimony of how sport can be mobilized to provide not merely pleasure but also attainable forms of comfort and connection in a changing world.

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