

“To keep the life of the Nation on the old lines”: *The Athletic News* and the First World War

John M. Osborne
Assistant Professor of History
Dickinson College
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Richard Titmuss, in a famous lecture delivered at King's College, London, in March, 1955, declared that “so far as the story of modern war before 1939 is concerned, little has been recorded in any systematic way about the social and economic effects of war on the population as a whole” and then went on to outline war's role in advancing social change and social policy in this century. In the following thirty years much work was done to correct this oversight, most notably for Britain in the efforts of Arthur Marwick, and this success has shown indeed how deeply the great modern wars have moved the nations upon which they have fallen.¹

More than signs of social and economic change emerge from the observation of modern states at war, however. The strains engendered expose the alliances and the divisions, the strengths and the weaknesses of a culture and test the beliefs and self-presentations of entire populations under a harsh and probing light. Change is the certain product of modern mass conflicts but so too are the reactions to change, those of fear, retrenchment, and conservatism. This study explores the impact of the First World War on one section of British society, its provincial sporting press, and in doing so seeks to illustrate how the pressures of the conflict highlighted important elements in the structure of the Edwardian sports world and brought particular reactions in many ways significant in their commonality with the nation as a whole.

A. J. Lee has ably outlined the problems met in examining Edwardian newspapers generally and the question particularly of who read them and in what numbers. He does point out, though, that before 1914 “the era of the real mass press had yet properly to begin” and that if the working class or even the lower middle class read newspapers at all it was in most cases probably those of the sporting press. For the sports historian, dealing with this sporting press and its readership has presented as many difficulties. Both Steven Tischler and Tony Mason have made brave efforts to examine the voluminous football press before

1. Richard M. Titmuss, *Essays on the Welfare State* (London, 1958. Beacon paperbooks edition), pp. 75ff. see, for example, Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge British Society and the first World War* (London, 1965).

1914 and have made some progress even while, as Mason candidly admits, producing here and there along the way “impressions whose greatest impact will be to make the social scientist blanch.”² The sporting press remains largely uncharted territory and much about the social and economic background of its readership sadly will never emerge. What is clear, however, is that which Mason calls the “symbiotic relationship” between the growth of organized sports and the rise of the sporting newspaper. This is the relationship to which this essay confines itself. The consumers of the sporting word must wait for another time, here the concentration will be on the producers of that word and their relationship with both the powers of organized sport and their society at large.

To do this, this work will center itself on the reaction of the editors and writers of Manchester’s *Athletic News* to the traumas of the Great War. There are two main justifications for such an approach. First, more narrowly, there was no other sports newspaper so successful nationally that was so closely tied up with the organization of mass spectator sport in England. Secondly, and of even wider significance here, few sports newspapers so successfully distributed claimed to be as representative of the provincial middle class attitudes and aspirations of life upon which the war was to have so much impact.

The Athletic News was founded by Edward Hulton in 1875 in Manchester as a weekly sports paper. In 1887, it cut its price in half-to a penny-and at Christmas 1888 moved its publication date from Saturdays to Mondays, both changes intended to exploit the immense rise in popularity of the sport which the paper covered most thoroughly, that of association football. The comfortable Northern adaptation to mass spectatorism was also displayed in a strong coverage also of Northern Union rugby football and, in the summertime of the various northern cricket leagues that competed for interest with the more prestigious, and more southern, county championship cricket. By 1896, the paper claimed a circulation in all areas of 180,000 copies per week and in the first decade of the new century was, as Mason says, “without doubt the country’s leading football weekly.” By this time, the *News* was also certainly the voice of professional sports club ownership. The paper’s conduct during the 1909 Football Players’ Strike made this clear, as did its obvious close associations with those who oversaw professional sport, particularly association football. J. J. Bentley, editor from 1892 until 1900, was also from 1893 to 1910 the president of the Football League, and, in his spare time, served as vice-president of the Football Association and as a director on Manchester United’s board. Later on, C. E. Sutcliffe, leader in both the League and the Association, and a Burnley F. C. director, wrote a weekly column in the *News*, using it as both pulpit and defense post for the interests of the club owners. The *Athletic News*, in fact, provided most of the evidence for Tischler’s assertion that “the

2. A. J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press 1855-1914* (London, 1976), pp 39-40, 224. Lee points out as evidence for the mass press as a post-First World War phenomenon that almost three times as many copies of London dailies and Sunday newspapers circulated in 1930 as did in 1910. Steven Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen: The Origins of Professional Soccer in England* (New York, 1981) and Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915* (Sussex, 1980), pp. 187ff.

sporting press supported football as it was structured and by doing so reinforced the hierarchy's position.³ The other professional sports benefited also from this main alliance, especially when the demands of those the paper saw as employees conflicted with the wishes of the men the News felt risked their investment for the life of the sport.

But there is more to the orientation of the News than that of economics. What the paper represented went deep into the heart of provincial middle class culture in other ways. Acceptance of professionalism set the leading middle class lights of the provinces off from many of their metropolitan brethren, unquestionably, but other values perhaps more in common with London moved these men of Manchester, Birmingham, and Sheffield as well. Along with the reports of professional football, rugby, and cricket, the News was packed with amateur sporting intelligence and comment. An impressive array of regular columnists reported track and field events, amateur rugby, school sports, cycling, motor-cycling, swimming, and golf. The advertisements included in the pages also were additional evidence that, even if the working classes may have followed the paper at times for its mass sports coverage, the main readership target was the solid middle classes. Behind only announcements for beverages such as "Fry's Cocoas" in size and prevalence, the dominant advertising revenues of the summer of 1914 flowed from cycling interests, both pedal and motor, selling products most usually out of the reach of all but the highly skilled worker.⁴

The unobtrusive business mores that Tischler describes combine here then with the more complex set of values of the Edwardian provincial middle classes. Eric Hobsbawm has recently argued in his provocative article on the "mass producing" of traditions that these particular classes were precisely those which were struggling to define an identity for themselves in an age when, at the same time an increasing number of occupations were claiming middle class status, "the fluidity of borders made clear criteria of social distinction unusually difficult." One of the ways in which definitions could be made, Hobsbawm argues, was through sports, especially sports where the dividing line of amateur participation could easily be drawn to differentiate one from the mass classes. Most usually, at the same time, these particular sports also "provided a mechanism for bringing together persons of an equivalent social status otherwise lacking organic social or economic links."⁵ In the north of England, it could be said that membership on the board of directors of professional sports clubs served this purpose admirably since men of similar social status could indeed come together to participate in what newspapers such as the *Athletic News* constantly referred to as the thankless, unrewarded, and unremunerated task of patronizing

3. Mason, *Association Football*. p. 191; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*. p. 79.

4. For example, *Athletic News*. (Hereafter AN). April 27. 1914 on p. 3 has 48 column inches for "Fry's" and on p. 7 a total of 110 column inches from various cycling tyre or machine firms including Dunlop, and Graves Cycles of Sheffield. On p. 8 also was a 22 column inch notice for Carnages' in London displaying summer sports goods.

5. Eric Hobsbawm. "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe. 1870-1914." in *The Invention of Tradition*. ed Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge. 1983). pp 291. 299.

a professional association or northern union football team merely “for the love of the game.”

Additionally, Hobsbawm speculates that this sense of belonging may have been most easily self-recognized and cemented in the rise of the middle class as the “quintessential patriotic class.”⁶ If the *Athletic News* had a sporting philosophy it was that professional sports were a natural and healthy business concern but that amateurism was a more personal and pure form of sports, to be preferred for both one’s own participation and the values such pursuits imbued. If the *News* had a political philosophy, meanwhile, it was one of active patriotism. This it held in common with many middle class sports administrators such as D. B. Woolfall, the honorary treasurer of the Football Association and president of the Lancashire F. A. or John McKenna of the Football League each of whom had spent more than twenty years in volunteer or territorial force service.⁷ In the regular columns of the *News*, this attitude’s principal was J. A. H. Catton, a long serving journalist who first wrote for the newspaper in 1886 as “Ubique,” then as “Tityrus,” and then as editor through the First World War and into the twenties. At his lead, in the winter of 1912, the *News* had “adopted and advocated the principles of the National Service League . . . while eschewing all party politics” and had “made a plan for compulsory service.” Under this plan, professional footballers especially would be called upon to raise a company of the territorial force for home defense from each club. This scheme met with little encouragement from either the War Office or the Football Association, or from the players themselves.⁸ Still, the setback did not deter the newspaper’s continued support of the widespread, influential, and largely middle class movement for national compulsory service and the general preparedness for the “defense of our dear homeland, and the fields of their delight, if the helms of the Germans, or any nation, confront our eyes.”⁹

Without making too much of the matter, Catton himself might perhaps be taken as representative of the desire for social cohesiveness about which Hobsbawm writes. Catton was born in the provinces and educated at Malvern, one of the new generation of public schools opened to accommodate the burgeoning middle class demand for status education. Leaving Malvern in 1875, barely ten years after its founding, for an apprenticeship as a journalist in Preston, Catton immediately encountered a second source of insecurity as a member of one of the new rising professions only just establishing themselves as “respectable.” Moving to his career home at the *Athletic News* a decade later, Catton joined an institution that stood, as we have seen, for the class of provincial businessmen administering professional sports on a solid economic

6. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

7. *AN*, August 17, 1941, p. 1. See also Catton’s obituary of Woolfall in *AN*, October 29, 1918.

8. *AN*, December 23 and 30, 1912; March 17, 1913, p.4, August 17, 1914, p.1 : October 29, 1918 .p. 1. See also Titchler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 131-132. For the players’ reaction see Colin Veitch, the Players’ Union chairman’s response in *Football Players’ Magazine*, February 1913, p. 13, also quoted in Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 132.

9. Catton in *AN*, March 17, 1913, p. 4. For more on the N.S.L. and those behind it see Ann Summers, “Militarism in Britain Before the Great War,” *History Workshop* 2 (Autumn 1976): 113-129.

“master and servant“ basis. Further, the News championed the middle class appropriation of amateur sports from aristocratic hands along with, in Hugh Cunningham’s words, “the ideological lumber with which they were encrusted,” and for the demonstration that “the ‘old English virtues’ ” of nationalism, prowess, and masculinity were now in more capable care. If Hobsbawm is correct, then both Catton and the *Athletic News* were middle class representatives of this very type of search for a “sense of belonging together” amongst “that large intermediate mass which so signally lacked other forms of cohesion.”¹⁰

So, at the outbreak of the First World War, the *Athletic News* was the primary provincial weekly sports newspaper in the country. It was the semi-official voice of those who organized and ran professional sports, and was representative of the “higher values” of amateur sports as well, including those of manliness and nation. In other words, the News stood firmly for the twin poles of the ethos of the rising provincial middle classes-business and patriotism. The events of the following four and a half years were to bend but not break this commitment.

The First World War brought particular problems for the rapidly developing modern British press. Both the Admiralty and the War Office censored war news from the beginning and soon there was an Official Press Bureau to which editors had to submit all controversial items for scrutiny. The press remained both independent and commercially acute, however. As Marwick observes, the press continued in its old habits of going in for “stunts and sensationalism rather than calculated brainwashing. Headlines got bigger and bolder, effecting a permanent change in newspaper presentation, but the patriotic rubbish printed remained the invention of proprietors and editors rather than of governments.”¹¹

In this light, although sports newspapers had fewer problems with censorship, organs like the *Athletic News* seemed paragons of responsibility and stability. During the entire war, the News printed only one piece directly concerning the conduct of the war-and that merely a single column wire service outline of the political and military situation during the first week of the conflict-and reserved all other topical comment for either exhortations to enlist for the struggle or for praise for the “sportsmen who have answered their country’s call.” At the same time, the News did not reflect the changes in format Marwick describes for the popular press in general. The paper was steadfastly conservative in this regard and the first peacetime issue in December 1918 was virtually identical in its format and presentation to the last pre-war issue of August 3, 1914.

The News could not resist all developments, however. The disruptions in leisure pursuits the war brought produced changes in the standard and quantity of the sports reported, of course, although many regular columns simply shifted

10. Hugh Cunningham. *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London. 1980). p. 117. Hobsbawm. “Mass Producing Traditions.” pp. 302-303.

11. Marwick. *Deluge*. p 51.

12. AN. August 10. 1914. pp. 1. 3

to a concentration on the war's impact on the pastimes they covered. Surprisingly though, the reduction in sports played did not curtail staff employment that drastically, although military service produced some absences. Of the twenty-three correspondents with an actual or pen-name by-line writing in the July 27, 1914 issue, fourteen were still contributing to the News in 1916 and 1917.¹³) War disruptions and the hostility in some circles to the sports that remained must have contributed, however, to the drop both in page space and advertising revenue that became clear during late 1914 and 1915. The large announcements for warm beverages so common in peacetime dried up almost completely as did most of the revenue from national advertisers of cycling equipment. After just a few weeks of war, the majority of space given to advertising concerned mostly smaller notices from less prominent local and regional concerns. Football and cricket equipment continued to be advertised as were patent medicines. Any award for both loyalty and unsinkable optimism among advertising accounts would certainly have gone to the competing Manchester firms of Bailey's and Ellison's who recommended their "modern and quick action" sports ground turnstiles regularly on every Monday through four years of war.

Such devotion notwithstanding, the pressures of the conflict clearly placed a strain on the relationship of the News with the great "ancillary industries" so much a part of the development of British sport in the previous thirty years.¹⁴ Eventually, an even more direct effect of the war caused the most damaging problems for the operation of the newspaper. The paper shortages that developed in Britain in 1916 and became more serious in the following year with the full scale German submarine blockade efforts often created grave publication difficulties. Two weeks after the declaration of war, the News had dropped from its usual eight pages to four although, as the professional winter sports went into full swing, the paper returned a month later with eight pages. As the war went on, however, the issue size was reduced again and fluctuated in 1915 and 1916 between either four and six pages. The material pressure finally told and at the end of April 1917, the proprietors suspended the separate publication of the News and incorporated it as a single page in the weekly issue of the senior partner in the Hulton sports paper enterprise, dedicated largely to racing, *The Sporting Chronicle*. The announced intention was for the News to be kept alive in this form with its writing staff and contributors as intact "so far as possible." The promise was to return "when there is a prospect of normal conditions" and, true to that pledge, a four page separate News reappeared on December 9, 1918,

13. AN, July 27, 1914: issues for June 5, 1916—the first after the Military Service Acts became complete and the last week in April 1917—the last issue before the News was combined with the *Sporting Chronicle* for the duration—were used for this brief and rather impressionistic survey. Evidence perhaps suggests that ever-widening conscription during 1917 and 1918 made more inroads into the staff of correspondents, columnists, and reporters. See e.g., AN, December 9, 1918.

14. Exceptions to the national firms retreat from advertising in the News including some sporadic notices for cycle tires from Dunlop, forcycles from Raleigh, and the occasional one for "Horlicks." See e.g., AN, February 7, 1916, June 5, 1916, and February 26, 1917.

four weeks after the Armistice to announce that the newspaper had survived the trials of the Great War and had kept safe the spirit of true sport.¹⁵

More important and illustrative for the historian than the material and business trials of the News during the war was the way in which this effort to fulfill its self-assigned role as protector of its particular idea of British sporting tradition was carried out. This had not been at all a simple task since the loyalties the paper held towards both business and patriotism had at times been most difficult to justify. Football's "crisis season" of 1914-1915 illustrates this point most clearly.

As war broke out, the professional football leagues of England, a multi-million pound sports industry employing more than 7000 playing paid entertainers, were making preparations for their season. The new backdrop for the season was an atmosphere of a patriotic excitement which approached hysteria and, among other things, enlisted over 750,000 volunteers to Army service in August and September 1914 alone. The administrators of the Football Association and the Football League followed both the imperatives of the contracts and plans already in place and the common belief that the war would be a sharp but short conflict, and decided to proceed with the season. The response of outraged "respectable public opinion" is well known.¹⁶ Especially in London, avenues of aristocratic and upper middle class comment such as the *Morning Chronicle* were filled with angry complaints and questions were raised both in Parliament and from the pulpits of the Church of England. Many felt this a cruel betrayal of British sporting traditions and heavy tirades were directed against those who played games while the nation was endangered. The token action of county cricket to suspend its season a few weeks before its end was taken as the correct precedent and the record of enlistment amongst amateur rugby players were compared to the way in which professional soccer and rugby continued business as usual. The storm only increased when the Football Association, under pressure from professional clubs worrying about their financial health, countenanced in November 1914 the playing of its own famous contribution to the spectacle of English professional sports, the F. A. Challenge Cup. After this, proposals were made like the one presented in the House of Commons that the government, now controlling the railways, charge anyone travelling to see a football match double the normal fare. The proprietors of the London daily press also weighed in with the hollow injunction limiting full coverage of professional matches "in all but the specialist sporting newspapers."¹⁷ The *Athletic News*, then, spent its first year of war faced with the unenviable task of negotiating between the twin standards of its ethos, between business and patriotism.

15. AN, April 16, 1917. p. 1. An indication of the continued importance of football during the war to both the News and the public was that this incorporation coincided with the end of the football season.

16. See John Osborne, "The British Sports Industry and the Opening of the First World War." paper presented to the Eleventh Biennial International Congress of the History of Sport and Physical Education. Glasgow, Scotland, July, 1985.

17. Western Daily Press. 24 November 1914: *The Times* (London) 28 November 1914.

The position without doubt would have been simplified if the Government had offered the sort of guidance it did to other sections of society under the new Defense of the Realm Acts. Instead, the official war effort being directed from the War Office continued to see sports-unlike drinking or gambling-as valid recreations so long as they did not significantly counter the mood and rhythm of national determination. When the F. A. had written to the War Office in early September 1914, offering to abandon all football, the official answer had sidestepped such responsibility saying not only that such a decision lay with the organizers of sports but that the government "would deprecate anything being done which does not appear to be called for in the present situation."¹⁸ Without firm direction from a Liberal Government determined to fight a war on "voluntary" concepts, organized sport was left to determine for itself the latitude of "uncalled for action" and to police itself accordingly. The task of articulating this self-regulation in the emotionally charged early months of the war, of course, fell to newspapers such as the *Athletic News*.

First, the News sought to reiterate the stabilizing value of sports for the British, saying that sport "would keep the life of the nation on the old lines, and . . . will assist to keep the body fit and the mind calm until such time as Right is vindicated." Additionally, sports and pastimes would serve the nation both at home and abroad. Catton reflected the dominant ideology of both his class and his newspaper when he pointed out that the sportsmen who have enlisted "will fight like gentlemen." This was a valuable contribution because, as Winston Churchill had said, "When the Test Match is finished and the victory is won we want the world to say England played the game." While triumph was being secured according to the rules of "fair-play," the continuation of sports at home the News contended, would serve as "some antidote to brooding, some sedative to calm the mind troubled with suspense" for those left behind.¹⁹ In short, sport would serve the nation in war as it had served it in peace.

In the face of outside attacks, especially on the professional aspects of sport, the News always defended the business of games even though this often took some convolution of thought. The constant line of defense was that the enterprises of professional soccer and rugby were indeed branches of industry and should be treated as such. Contracts had to be maintained and no good would come of the arbitrary financial ruin of the limited companies involved. Directors who would suffer were "amateurs" who neither gained nor wanted any gain on their investments in the clubs, while the players were mostly underage or unfit for military service through either infirmity or family responsibilities and would be made destitute if their clubs were bankrupted. Beyond this, it was argued, business was not antithetical to patriotism since, in addition to its palliative effects, professional sports were particularly suited to serve the nation as a vehicle for the raising of money for charity and as a focus for the continued recruitment of the volunteer army. When Catton resurrected his pre-war idea of

18. F. J. Wall to Secretary of War, 8 September 1914 and Cubitt to Wall, 10 September 1914; copies in FA Minutes. *Archives of the Football Association*, Lancaster Gate. London.

19. AN. 21 September 1914, p. 3, 10 August 1914, p. 1.

drill for professional players saying “surely the football clubs of England can form one organisation-the Hearth and Home Defenders,” the *Athletic News*’ reunification of business with patriotism was complete.²⁰

If the response to outside attacks upon sport were defended throughout on a mostly united front, there was significant disagreement and difficulty within the sporting world as how to police the sports industry at war. This especially surfaced as clubs struggled to survive in that first emotionally and financially troubled season of the conflict. Steven Tischler suggests, in keeping with what was said earlier, that the close relationship of the sporting press with the business powers of sport meant that the press always finally sided with the owners in a conflict with their employees. Though the facts show some variance with this idea, particularly when charges were laid that clubs were preventing players from carrying through on their patriotic desires to enlist, in the end the test of fire of the “crisis season” proves Tischler correct. When a players’ strike was threatened-and in the case of Bristol Rovers briefly carried through-over a mid-season cut in wages, the News, after an attempt to look at both sides fairly, came down on the side of the owners and gave voice both to the old and tried tactics of painting the players as grossly overpaid and to its own pre-war provincial view of an organic and ordered world where the masters ruled and the servants served.²¹ If the wartime sports world was being policed from within, it was being policed in the conservative terms of the past.

After the end of the first season and the subsequent decision of most professional sports bodies to suspend professionalism and their main professional competitions for the duration of the war, the News settled more comfortably into the role of standard-bearer for those keeping alive the idea and organization of sport as it had flourished in Edwardian Britain. The paper praised and encouraged the directors who kept their clubs afloat in the limbo of “wartime football” even when the Government’s imposition of an entertainments tax in the third year of the war “caused the faith of even the strong to waiver.” “Slackers,” on the other hand, such as those in professional rugby’s Northern Union-where the News said “instead of enterprise there has been as nearly as possible sheer neglect”-came in for rough treatment.²² Under the leadership of the *Athletic News*, the country’s sports were playing their part in maintaining both the war effort and the fires burning in the “Englishman’s home.”

The sacrifices away from home were also proclaimed in the News as hardly an issue went by in 1917 and 1918 without the word of sportsmen, both professional and amateur, killed at the front. One example of two such announcements on a single day in October 1918 reminds us of the essential difference between the paid and unpaid sportsman, however. Jack Shelton of Wolverhampton Wanderers was said to have “fallen in the fight on the Western Front” leaving a widow and two children and “work for the National Football War Fund.” On the

20. AN, 7 September 1914. p. 3; 14 September 1914; 12 October 1914; 30 November 1914.

21. Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*. 80, AN, 16 November 1914.

22. AN. 15 May 1917. p. 1. “A Policy of Indifference” headlined this story. AN, 19 February 1918

same page, in the next column, the death of a Durham School Old Boy rugby player was reported as "Poor Captain Charlie Adamson has joined the legion of sportsmen-warriors in Valhalla."²³

This constant attention to sacrifice helped sustain the particular provincial middle class world view of the *Athletic News*. Such events only increased the conservation of such values because the past was continually seen as being vindicated in the present. Frank Starr, writing as "Rifleman," typified such work when he said that

sportsmen have preached the athletic doctrines and poets-Walt Whitman, for instance-have sung it; but it is only today, when the unathletic are ticketed 'unfit,' when the products of sedentary occupations are found to be useless for the task of saving our country and the liberty of the world, that our opponents are beginning to realise that we were right and they were wrong.

Starr even went so far as to say later that if it had not been for sports producing the soldiers needed "the anti-athletic brigade might ere this have been lining the streets to watch the triumphal march of German troops through London and Manchester."²⁴

When the matter of the future was addressed, the pages of the *News* made it clear that the attitudes which had served well before would continue to do so and would even grow stronger. For example, Northern league cricket, more provincial and "modern," and which had continued throughout the war, Catton felt would in the peace "capture the public and players" from the southern and London dominated county cricket, which had been moribund since 1914 and lacked the "vivid appeal" of league cricket. Some of the discussion of the future in this later part of the war reflected also a desire not only to refine what had worked before the war, but to reverse some of the dangerous trends with which sports had been threatened. This reflected what Cunningham first observed in the mid-Victorian middle class as "their yearning for a more simple and organic society." Also, this fountainhead of middle class conservatism, if it had faced growing complications of life in the Edwardian decades that had ranged from impending civil war in Ulster to organised labor's threat of a general strike, now faced the possibility of a tidal wave of change born of total war. By 1917, expectations of post-war change were in the air. As B. A. Waites points out, "implicit in the philosophy of the Reconstruction Movement was the assumption that the war had, by acting on men's consciousness, generated forces for social change proportional to itself. It was universally accepted that the war had been a great revelatory experience."²⁵

Through 1917 and 1918 those who spoke through the *Athletic News* sought to hold back what they considered as unwanted futures. To these men the revelations of the war were mostly that their ethos had been justified and needed to be

23. *AN*, 1 October 1918. p. 1.

24. *AN*, 10 January 1916. p. 3 and 12 June 1916. p. 2.

25. *AN*, 7 August 1917. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*. p. 104; B A. Waites. "The effect of the First World War on class and status in England, 1910-1920," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 39

reasserted. In the face of possible labor conflicts in the sports industry, which had reflected the growth of working class militancy of society in general before the war, the News, for example, floated the proposal of J. C. Clegg, influential contributor both to the F. A. and the inner workings of club owners, that no post-war professional earn his money completely from football, that he instead be required to hold and follow a second trade, and, in effect become a part-time player. The paper's rugby correspondent's hope a few months later that "the days of absurdly high wages for playing will never again return" supported this desire that the more burdensome trends in professionalism be reversed. Though these ideas seem to reflect more the thoughts of southern amateurism than northern professionalism, in reality they were much more a hopeful effort both to reassert employer control over previously troublesome employees and to cut business overhead following a costly four year financial storm. As usual, the News supported Clegg "wholly and unreservedly" and, under the headline "The Higher Duty of Professionals," pointed the way toward a less complicated sports industry, this time under a proper and unquestioned leadership made all the more fitting by the experience of the war. "It must not be forgotten," Catton wrote, "that if football is to gain respect and popularity the game must, as in the past two years, be so ordered and governed as to have the mass of public opinion behind it. Let the game flourish, but not to the exclusion of every other consideration. The tendency of professionalism is to exalt victory and money above everything else. Our spectacles have been cleaned, and most people see clearer."²⁶

Other new ideas received a cooler reception in the paper's pages, especially those which violated long-held precepts. Among these was the reconstruction agitation for a "Ministry of Recreation" and a government sponsored infusion of games and training. The paper gave extensive coverage to the idea, nevertheless. Lord Leverholme, for example, held that the changes of war organisation suggested opportunities for a better future, saying "weakly lads and men have been made strong as a result of military training and outdoor life; frail girls and women have become quite athletic-looking by their new duties; and it is for the State to see that they do not go back in the future." When the socialist Minister of Pensions, John Hodge, seconded the view and recommended state subsidized "recreation for all," the News gave its opinion of this new future under the headline "Clamor by Parrot-Cry." "From the one extreme of positive indifference to the other of exaggerated interference a jump has been taken," was the comment then, and two weeks later Catton warned against the loss of spontaneity in such efforts saying "let us be careful that we do not destroy [sports'] intrinsic character and convert them into lessons for boys and girls and duties for men and women." Clegg's statement in the paper almost a year later that "the State must not undertake the management of sports" completed the view that if sports were to remain valuable to the nation they should not be returned to the hands of the government elite and should remain in the care of those men who

26. AN. 7 August 1917. p. 1. and 27 November 1917. p. 1. No such program was enacted. however.

knew them best.²⁷ The Ministry of Recreation and Sport did not materialize after the war.

On the eleventh of November, 1918, the Armistice agreement came into effect and, as noted, less than a month later a four page *Athletic News* appeared as a separate paper and "life without the ghastly woes and burdens of the past few years" began again.²⁸ Soon independence and advertising revenues were re-established and the News took on an appearance remarkably like that of early 1914 in both format and contributors.

This visual impression of conservatism was mirrored from the beginning of the post-war period in the attitude of those directing the paper. Catton laid out his plans deliberately in that first issue announcing that "the *Athletic News* will preserve those features which have proved popular in the past, and tentatively, even slowly, we shall introduce new attractions and gradually reach the full size and completeness that prevailed in the spring of 1914." He went on to assure everyone that the earnest and particularly provincial values of the News were to be maintained, promising "to contend fearlessly, as we have ever done, for honest and real sport, whether played by amateurs or professionals. We do not ask whether a man is an amateur or a professional so long as he is a straight-dealer and plays the game."²⁹

Though obviously reacting in some ways to the hopes and fears of those facing the unaccustomed post-war world, the News, largely thanks to Catton, reflected the old twin values of patriotism and of business. Satisfied that England had indeed "played the game" and loyal to the memory of the sacrifice of the "mighty fallen," as late as February 1920 Catton defended the collective agreement among British and Allied sports administrators to exclude their erstwhile foes from international competitions like the 1920 Antwerp Olympic Games. Declaring that such participation could only happen once Germany had atoned fully, he wrote that "the British consider that the Teutons were not clean fighters, and had they assimilated the spirit of sport [in the way the British had] they could not have stained their hands with the blood of innocents as they did."³⁰

The close ties of the News with the powers in the sports industry were also re-established in peacetime as they had been maintained in wartime. Again, the middle class "amateur" enthusiasts who directed England's winter professional sports were both praised for their efforts of the past and given a vote of confidence for the future. For Catton, the "directors of the clubs, *the men who are never paid* [newspaper's italics] have kept these clubs alive" and held that although there were "visionaries and dreamers about" floating proposals for the future life of soccer, the League was "quite capable of setting its house in order."³¹

27. AN, 11 June 1918 1: 18 June 1918. 1, 30 July 1918. p.1;12 May 1919. p.1

28. AN. 3 December 1918,p. 1.

29. AN. 3 December 1918,p. 1.

30. AN. 9 February 1920,p. 4.

31. AN. 23 December 1918. 1: 26 November 1918, p.1

But clearly the years immediately after the war were difficult ones for the class and the values that the News and its editor represented. The pre-war militarism of the National Service League had been sobered in four historic and dreadful years. There was no more talk of training players in drill and marksmanship and, in a more impressionistic light, the language of even the match reporting signified war weariness. For example, the editor's coverage of the 1920 Association Cup Final contained only two mild "battlefield" metaphors whereas his report on the last pre-war final in April 1914 had been peppered with references to one team, Burnley not "bombarding" but relying on "sudden assaults" and the other, Liverpool, being "slower to unlimber and dash into action."³²

More than the nation's attitude to war had changed between 1914 and 1918, however. The organization of society for the first great modern war had changed the socio-economic structure of Britain. As Waites has pointed out, English society had changed by 1920 from a complex hierarchy to a more simple system in which stratification by status played less of a role. Further, the losers in this change, thanks largely to higher income taxation, were the professional middle classes for whom institutions such as the *Athletic News* provided cohesion. The apparent advancing classes in the perception of many were the more confidently organized workers and "the self assertiveness which the labour movement acquired both among its leaders and its rank-and-file as a result of its role in the war added to the possibility of class conflict."³³ Thus threatened by even more radical change in the new peace than it had been in the war, the natural reaction of the middle classes was defensiveness and truculence.

Relations between owners and workforce in the sports industry demonstrated the hardening of lines. The players' leader, Charlie Roberts of Manchester United, commenting on what he saw as immediately unfair peacetime pay policies called this "our first reward" for loyalty at home and service in France that had made the very survival of the clubs possible. He went on to warn of "a rude awakening" for owners. True to form, though open debate was seen in the columns of the News, the anti-unionism of the paper dominated. Players were warned of the dangers of combination, were threatened-"if players can run football by all means let them try"-and were appealed to for patience and understanding since "strife is costly for all."³⁴

As is well known, both Britain and the British professional sports industry, thanks mostly in all probability to the invaluable societal cohesion of victory, avoided a proletarian revolution in 1919. But if turmoil did not come, neither did the new world and the "homes fit for heroes" for which the great sacrifices had been seen to have been made. Truculence and fiscal constraint triumphed over both radicalism and reconstruction.

This troublesome and confused atmosphere of conflicting hopes and fears for the future helped produce one of the most lasting legacies of the Great War in

32. AN. 26 April 1920, p. 5 and 27 April 1914, p. 3.

33. Walks. "The Effect of the First World War," 45.

34. AN. 3 March 1919, p. 3; 23 December 1918, p. 1; 10 March 1919, p. 4

Britain, that of a particular nostalgia for the past that helped reaffirm the conservatism of middle class institutions such as the *Athletic News*. This comfort in what was known was, as has been shown, well in keeping with the paper's self-proclaimed role as bastion for a particularly Edwardian quest for provincial middle class cohesion and definition. This habit presents a strong example of what Hobsbawm calls generally "invented tradition" or "a contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some part of social life within it as unchanging and invariant."³⁵

The patriotism of the fundamental British sporting ethic and the validity and strength of the emerging business orientation of those who controlled British sporting life that had contributed to this "sense of belonging" for the provincial middle classes before the war faced stern examination during the threatening years of the Great "Test Match." In its tenacious defense of the twin pillared ethos both in the ambiguities of 1914 and 1915 and in the more ominous new world of 1917 and 1918, the *Athletic News* reflected in some ways the experiences of a provincial middle class faced with the changes of total war. At the same time, the News' part of the struggle of this Edwardian belief system to resist the implications of the realities of a transforming world pointed to important directions of continued nostalgic conservatism in the management of British sport, the fruits of which were to plague the British sports industry for decades to follow.

35. Hobsbawm and Ranger. *Invention of Tradition*. p. 2.