

A MODERNIST'S VIEW

During the last decade, Allen Guttman has made a variety of contributions to the scholarly study of sport, but his most important remains *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. There are several reasons for the significance of this book. Written at a critical juncture within the development of sport history, Guttman successfully integrated a vast and diverse literature into both an insightful examination of the nature and difference between premodern and modern sport, and an interesting critique of the various theories of the relationship between sport and society. In addition, he made North American sport scholars painfully aware of the limitations created by their general unfamiliarity with the European and particularly the German scholarship on sport. Finally, the most valuable contribution of this thought-provoking book, whether one agreed with Guttman's views or not, was that it evoked and elevated the level of dialogue within sport studies, and provided a medium for an exchange of ideas between sport historians and sport sociologists.

Guttman announces that readers of *From Ritual to Record* will find in his newest book, *Sports Spectators*, "a shift in emphasis from cultural to social history, from a concern with conceptualizations of sport to the observation of demographic variables and behavior" (p. 9). Despite these changes, the two works share much in common. Once again, Guttman presents a well-written but short work in which he synthesizes a vast literature on sport, written in a variety of languages and embracing different disciplinary perspectives. Once again, Guttman provides an interesting and generally judicious view of his subject. And, once again, Guttman's thought-provoking book will no doubt stimulate dialogue within sport studies whether one agrees or disagrees with his analysis.

Guttman's examination of sport from the early modern era to the present focuses on two major and interrelated questions—the social characteristics of sport spectators and the kinds of behaviors they have expressed in their spectating role. He is also particularly interested in exploring whether spectator violence increased or decreased over this extended period. To investigate these questions, Guttman devotes two chapters to the historical literature on a representative group of spectator sports from the seventeenth century until roughly World War II, and then shifts methodological gears to provide a sociological, economic and psychological analysis of sport spectators in contemporary society.

Guttman's thesis is that spectator violence has decreased over the past 350 years. This decline was already evident in the period from the Restoration until the early nineteenth century, although it was "not linear and there never was a

(Ndw York: Columbia University Press. 1978).

moment when sport spectators were not liable to become unruly, tumultuous, or even riotous" (p. 81). During the subsequent century and a half, spectator violence was markedly curtailed. Guttmann recognizes that misconduct at sporting events persisted, especially at English soccer matches, and that symbolically charged contests could produce riots as was the case following the Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries heavyweight championship fight. Nevertheless, he contends that the number of incidents were small considering the ever expanding number of people that passed through the gates of the various sporting arenas.

Guttmann does not bring any quantifiable data to prove that spectator violence decreased, and until such difficult to generate but necessary evidence is produced any definitive conclusion must be held in abeyance. However, through his examination of societal and sporting influences, he presents a convincing argument, one which for the time being places the burden of proof on those who dissent from his position. Guttmann asserts that shifting concepts of civil order emerging from political, religious and economic changes contributed to the transformation of sport spectators. Those who attended sporting events participated in what Norbert Elias called the "civilizing process" which enhanced the internalization of restraint and the development of a strong superego.

The better behavior of sporting crowds was not solely the by-product of societal alterations. Guttmann points out how several sport-specific factors influenced this process, such as the commercialization of sport. Entrepreneurs had a vested interest in maintaining order because they desired to attract large audiences and had considerable property to protect. They took a variety of steps to ensure this objective including encouraging the presence of women, the construction of enclosed arenas and the establishment of varying ticket prices which separated the different social classes. "Although Marxist scholars have held capitalism responsible for the violence which disfigures modern sports," Guttmann insists that the capitalistic instinct more likely "worked in the opposite direction" (p. 82). The creation of the code of spectatorship was equally if not more important to the preservation of order. Guttmann provides an outstanding examination of the nature of the code and how it was created in the sporting press, the juvenile literature on sport, and at schools and universities. While the code was never perfectly institutionalized, and discrepancies existed between rhetoric and reality even among the "respectable element" of society, Guttmann claims that the nineteenth century sports crowd "knew how it was supposed to behave" (p. 89).

Guttmann's treatment of sport spectators and the contests they watched is not without its limitations. Given the broad sweep of this work, it is not surprising that a few factual errors have crept in. For example, he erroneously claims that the Harvard-McGill contest in 1874 was the first football game, but this honor belongs to the Princeton-Rutgers game played five years earlier. The brevity of the book is a more serious drawback. While it could have been easily expanded three times its current length and the subject would still not have been ex-

hausted, there are a variety of places where Guttman's insightful comments have the reader wishing for more discussion and analysis. For example, his comparison of cricket in rural England and the British West Indies could have been expanded into a more extensive discussion of spectatorship as community. The work should also have given greater attention to how spectators and the sports they attended intersected with social and cultural developments. Future research would profit from an analysis of how sport spectators were similar and different from observers of other forms of entertainment.² Guttman should have questioned the reported size of sports crowds prior to the late nineteenth century since they were grossly exaggerated. The realization that these figures were often inflated necessitates that scholars be exceedingly cautious in accepting contemporary accounts of who and how many were present at sporting events and begin devising new ways of examining the number and social class of sport spectators.³

The most serious flaw with Guttman's historical overview is his insistence that baseball was essentially a lower class sport. This contention runs counter to the current interpretation most coherently articulated in Steven Riess's *Touching Base*.⁴ Guttman provides no evidence to substantiate his claim, rather his argument is based on an ethnic analysis of professional baseball players and owners. Since he believes that a strong correlation exists between those who watch and those who play, and because members of ethnic groups generally engaged in blue-collar occupations, baseball crowds should have come from this socio-economic strata. Several problems exist with this line of reasoning. First, the writings of first generation Americans do not indicate that they attended baseball games. Second, while Guttman correctly states that in America "a class analysis of almost any social phenomena can usefully be supplemented by an ethnic analysis" (p. 111), there is a need to be cautious that supplementing a class analysis does not supplant it. Since the migration of each ethnic group to America took place over an extended period of time, each ethnic community had a significant number of individuals who were financially, if not socially, middle class. In fact, the presence of Irish politicians or notables from other ethnic groups at baseball games need not be interpreted as a desire to identify with heroes from their own group, but rather can also be viewed as a public proclamation of their Americanism.⁵ Finally, the critical issue of the relationship between baseball participants and spectators needs to be con-

2. In several places in the book Guttman does touch on the similarities and differences between the viewers of sport and other forms of entertainment, but he chooses not to explore this theme in detail.

3. For problems with contemporary accounts of the size of sporting crowds, see Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 50-51, 299, 314, 346.

4. Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980). Guttman recognizes Riess's argument in a footnote but focuses on only one of the less central components of his evidence—the clothing of spectators—to the exclusion of numerous other points Riess made to support his thesis.

5. For an interesting discussion of ethnic leaders, see Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910 Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

fronted. While professional baseball always attracted players from ethnic America, no hardcore data exists on what percentage they constituted. Even if it was a high one, it is ludicrous to conclude that ethnics comprised the majority of the fans. By this logic, the majority of spectators at NBA games should be black. The assertion of a spectator-participant relationship has merit, but the focus needs to be on the general participant not the professional athlete. The evidence on this group indicates the middle class basis of the majority of baseball's spectators.⁶

Guttmann devotes slightly less than a third of the book to the contemporary era, strongly suggesting that recent events were his major area of interest. To explore these developments, Guttmann examines four different questions devoting a chapter to each one. He offers valid reasons for why he leaves the historical mode in this section, not the least of which is his contention that scholars should be allowed to investigate those questions which most interest them. However, historians will be disappointed by his desire not to synthesize recent event within the context of an historical narrative since only a few scholarly works have attempted to do so.⁷ Even conceding Guttmann's claim that "most of the basic patterns of spectatorship were established by the 1930s" (p. 128), there is a need to account for the style and kinds of alterations that have resulted from improved transportation, the marked increase in the number of sporting activities occurring at night and the geographical and numerical expansion of professional and college teams. Finally, the reasons for the ongoing continuity of spectator patterns requires more analysis, especially given the rising standard of living and the emergence and growth of the consumer society.

Guttmann's examination of sport spectators since World War II begins with an analysis of the impact of the media. He again is at his best when exploring cross cultural similarities, and his discussion of the readership of sporting journals throughout Western society is particularly illuminating. However, there are problems with his treatment of the impact of television on sport as he repeats the common charges against this media. Guttmann is especially critical of the enormous and mostly nefarious influence TV has on college athletics. He asserts that the increasing reliance on TV dollars has intensified the pressure to win at all cost and results in coaches demanding "more and more of 'student athletes' who are recruited less and less with regard for the NCAA's unenforced rules" (p. 139). Guttmann recognizes that the problems with American collegiate sport predate the TV age, but he insists that the new media has "made the disease incurable" (p. 140).

6. Adelman. *A Sporting Time*. 124-126, 138-142, 154-156, 175-176; Stephen Freedman, "The Baseball Fan in Chicago, 1865-1870: An Exploration of the Role of Sport in the Nineteenth-Century City." *Journal of Sport History* 5 (Summer 1978). 54-55; George Kirsch, "The Rise of Modern Sports: New Jersey Cricketers, Baseball Players, and Clubs, 1845-60." *New Jersey History*, 101 (Spring/Summer 1983). 61-74.

7. For examples, see Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Spectators* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1983), 242-360; William J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982) 261-339; Richard D. Mandell, *Sport. A Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). 218-281.

The flaw with the contention that TV has made it impossible to cure the ills of college sport is that it is premised on the assumption that the problem could have been rectified had it not been for this media. While TV clearly contributes to the current troubles, the course of college athletics was mapped out, along with its concomitant problems, once institutions of higher learning committed themselves to a commercially based model of sport and constructed huge arenas to attract spectators. There is also no reason to accept that the expansion of TV revenue intensifies the potential for underpaid college athletes to become susceptible to the influence of gamblers. In fact, the point shaving scandal of 1951 predated the profound TV impact on college sport, and it may be argued that the tremendous under the table money now available to good point guards, strong power forwards and talented seven foot centers reduces the temptation of college athletes to look to gamblers for a financial fix.

Guttman's treatment of TV's influence on sport is illustrative of the limitations with the accepted view on this theme.⁸ In examining this subject, scholars and journalists have treated TV as an independent variable. This orientation is not surprising since this media added an element not previously present and one which obviously plays a dominant role within the contemporary sporting scene. However, this perspective results in TV emerging as the causal factor for explaining sporting developments and allows it to become a convenient scapegoat in assessing the roots of athletic problems. Equally significant, it encouraged writers to neglect examining how other societal influences, acting independently or in concert with TV, impinged on sport. Guttman falls into this trap especially when he discusses the simultaneous rise of TV sport and the decline of minor league baseball, boxing and attendance at English soccer matches. By failing to look at other influences for these occurrences, he leaves the impression that TV was responsible. Yet parallel events are not causal ones. Even without TV sport, minor league baseball would have declined since a host of new societal influences altered the nature of the communities that had once supported these teams.⁹

Followers of Guttman's writings will not be surprised by his critique of the Neo-Marxist view of sport spectators. He argues that the data does not support their contention that capitalist society creates a spectator-participant dichotomy or that sport deflects the masses from political action. In making his case, Guttman astutely points to the need to establish accurate categories of measurement. His significant point is not that there are obviously more watchers than doers, but rather that spectators are far more likely to participate in sport

8. The conventional wisdom on television's impact on sport is most clearly stated in Benjamin G. Rader. In *Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

9. To blame the televising of boxing for the decline of the sport during the late 1950s and early 1960s fails to account for numerous other intervening variables. For example, the fate of the sport during these years were equally tied to the Kefauver Commission which clearly demonstrated the linkage between boxing and the underworld, to important post World War II changes in the ethnic communities which had formerly produced the leading boxers, and quite possibly to the fact that black men came to dominate the sport at a time when most whites still found it difficult to relate to the average black athlete.

and other cultural areas than non-watchers. His treatment of sport spectating as catharsis is particularly interesting as he seeks to find a middle ground between the Neo-Marxist view and the recent psychological literature on this theme. He rejects both the Neo-Marxist contention that the cathartic effect of watching sport is to infantilize and dehumanize the spectator and the current scholarship which argues that there is no evidence to support the catharsis theory. He perceptively notes that the research designs of these studies are flawed because they measured aggression and hostility at inappropriate times. He insists that the cathartic effect should be measured "not immediately before and after the game itself but before and after the lengthier period of time which frames the entire sporting experience" (p. 157). Only further research will prove whether expanding the time-frame supports the catharsis theory, but Guttman believes that a modified form of this perspective can be established since spectator sports provide excitement and then release from normally proscribed and inhibited behavior. In adopting this stance, Guttman subscribes to the Neo-Marxist contention that watching sport can serve as a social safety valve for capitalistic culture, but he finds it ironic that they have failed to note that it may also stimulate lower class fans "to rebel if not revolt against the social system which exploits them" (p. 158). While Guttman has correctly chided the left for their frequent simplistic view, does he really expect us to believe that every anti-social act is one short step for the revolution?

Guttman's study climaxes with his analysis of spectator violence in contemporary society. While he maintains that when compared to the early modern period and before "there does not seem to be reason for alarm about the present situation," he does concede that there are "signs of an increase of sport-related violence in societies where violence of all sorts are on the increase" (p. 164). Guttman argues that the recent events are unrelated to the nature of the sport being watched or the product of national character. He further notes that while various theories of collective behavior may aid in comprehending the action of sport spectators, the causes of spectator violence are more fruitfully understood by examining the historical context and the standard sociological variables of age, gender, and especially social class.

Guttman maintains that cross cultural data demonstrate that violent spectators are overwhelmingly young, male and lower class.¹⁰ examine why the lower-class male youth engage in sport violence, Guttman focuses almost exclusively on soccer since this problem is most associated with this sport and because most of the research on this theme has concentrated on this sport. He agrees with those sociologists who have argued that soccer violence must be understood from the perspective of the actors. Within this context, their behavior rather than being deviant is both purposeful and ritualized. Drawing on Eric Dunning's work, he asserts that the lower class continues to express many of the characteristics of premodern society. The social configuration of

10. Guttman's data on this point is convincing and the essential thrust of his argument appears accurate. However, I strongly suspect that a built in bias exists in the procedure used to identify those who engage in sport violence thereby overrepresenting the lower class male youth.

this society and the way it bonds its members together not only differs from modern society, but also generates acute forms of aggressive masculinity. Since lower class males have long admired physical toughness, “sport hooliganism is not something out of the ordinary” (p. 171). Quite the contrary, it is a means of status and identity, and a fan that has not been physically injured is often not viewed as a true supporter.

Guttman’s analysis may explain the motives of soccer hooligans, but it does not account for the recent increase in hooliganism. If this action expresses traditional values, then its extent should be at least proportionately the same to what it was thirty or forty years earlier. Guttman’s sole explanation (again drawing upon Dunning) is that the spread of violence intensified as young fans became less tied to their immediate locale largely as a result of the emergence of cheap transportation. This thesis not only requires more substantiating evidence than currently exists before it can be accepted, but it is exceedingly doubtful that any single causal factor can provide a comprehensive account for the rise in soccer hooliganism.¹¹ more satisfactory analysis would emerge by relating this behavior to the broader changes within all facets of English and European societies over the last thirty years, and especially by examining how these forces affected youth and youth culture during these years.¹²

Guttman would have added to our understanding of spectator violence if he had more thoroughly dissected the sport-specific context in which this action took place. He reports on the number of riots associated with various sports in America and notes that some of the worst outbursts here occurred in the aftermath of contests between mainly white and black high schools. However, there is still the need to know the answer to such questions as whether violence is more prevalent following day or night games, on weekdays or weekends. Does the level of competition affect this behavior? Is it more frequently associated with championship rather than regular season contests, and does it matter whether the home team wins or loses?

Guttman concludes with an examination of why people have watched sporting events. He recognizes that there is no universally valid answer, and proceeds to offer a collage of interwoven motivations. The appeal of sport rests in part with its ability to evoke erotic, aesthetic and religious emotions, although he notes sport is neither art nor religion. He also points to an economic motive, gambling, and political aims, especially nationalism. In addition, there are psychological reasons for the attraction to spectator sports, and Guttman

11. Guttman also insists that in America the “enormous distance between the rival franchises of professional teams sports must have reduced the level of spectator violence” (p. 122). If proximity is a factor in spectator violence, then future research should discover a greater level at contests between the former Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants, as well as at games between the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees, and the Chicago Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals (which share fans from the same regional sphere). While we await the results of this research, Guttman should not have made professional sport synonymous with the major leagues. In fact, many minor league baseball teams, especially in the pre-World War II years, had nearby rivals, such as the Newark Bears and the New Jersey Giants, the Minneapolis Millers and the St. Paul Saints, and the Los Angeles Angels and the Hollywood Stars. Once again we need to know if violence was greater at these contests before accepting Guttman’s contention.

12. For discussion of youth culture in contemporary England, see Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976).

discusses how sport promotes group identity because it provides common symbols, a collective identity and a reason for solidarity.

Since the motives Guttman offers for sport spectatorship are those commonly found in the scholarly literature, his treatment of this theme is to a certain extent disappointing. Clearly there is always the hope that a scholar of his reputation would unlock a previously undiscovered door, thereby providing fresh insights and a new interpretation. However, it is quite possible that the research of the last quarter century has dissected all the reasons why people watch sport. If this is the case, Guttman's discussion is valuable for what may be extrapolated from it. The various rationales do not indicate any deeply complex or esoteric explanation for sport spectatorship with the possible exception of its erotic nature. What they do collectively point to is that involvement in sport intersects with a wide variety of different facets of human life. It is in the multiple ways sports spectatorship can touch base with the private and collective existence which goes far in explaining its enduring popularity. It is also possible that the importance attached to sport and the prominent place it has, especially in modern society, may flow from the fact that the nature of the activity more readily facilitates, when compared to other kinds of cultural forms, the creation of linkages to other modes of human expression.

Sports Spectators is an ambitious attempt to synthesize the social characteristics of observers of sport and their spectating behaviors. Non-specialists in sport studies will find the book particularly rewarding. Guttman provides them with an interesting overview of who watched sport, how they behaved and what their motives were. Specialists will find much that is familiar and see problems within the study. Nevertheless, even for these scholars his examination and interpretation of the current state of the art on sport spectators is a valuable piece of research. The book is well worth reading, dissecting, criticizing and discussing. Most important, sport scholars must heed the central message of the work—that we have not given enough attention to this significant theme and that more research on this subject is necessary. While the availability of sources, as Guttman recognizes, will always limit our ability to know exactly who attended sporting contests and why, new ways to reconstruct the data can and must be established so as to provide fresh insights into these important questions.

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