
The Future as History in Sport and Physical Education

by

Earle F. Zeigler

The University of Western Ontario

(Maxwell L. Howell Address)

I want to help you, me, and any others who might be interested understand more fully “what it is about the recent past for which optimism as a philosophy of historic expectations has failed to prepare us . . . It is an outlook on the future as history” (Heilbroner, 1960). More specifically I feel that our optimism in regard to automatic progress has blinded us so that we have not been able to see and truly comprehend how such a condition and expectations arose. And still more specifically I have been searching for some direct implications for sport and physical education within this vortex of social forces and influences. This includes certain specific professional concerns that have confronted our field and society in the past, and which will undoubtedly - along with the addition of new ones and the possible removal of old ones - be with us as problems for resolutions in the future. In this paper, therefore, I will (1) briefly mention the social forces at work with their concomitant professional concerns; (2) present Heilbroner’s concept of ‘the future as history’; (3) discuss the idea of progress briefly; (4) suggest some implications for sport and physical education from Heilbroner’s concept, while relating the concept of ‘progress’ to

the United States; and (5) draw a few reasonable conclusions based on this analysis.

Social Forces and Professional Concerns. At least five pivotal social forces (or influences) have affected society - and directly or indirectly that aspect of the culture which has been identified variously as physical education or sport (or some combination thereof) - during the different periods of history. They are (1) the influence of values and norms, (2) the influence of politics (type of political state), (3) the influence of nationalism, (4) the influence of economics, (5) the influence of religion, and more recently (6) the influence of a so-called ecological ethic. To these six have been added some ten professional and/or general educational concerns, the last of which - the concept of 'progress' - could be placed in either of the two main categories. These concerns are (1) curriculum, or what shall be taught; (2) methods of instruction, or how shall the curriculum be taught; (3) professional preparation or training; (4) the concept of what constitutes a healthy body; (5) the role of women in physical education and sport; (6) the role of dance in physical education and recreation; (7) the use of leisure; (8) amateurism, semiprofessionalism, and professionalism in sport; (9) the role of management (administration); and (10) the concept of what constitutes progress (viewed both as a social force *and* as a professional concern).

The Concept of 'The Future as History.' Heilbroner's concept of 'the future as history' is as follows: America - the United States - acquired the belief that it had a personal "deity of history"; this led a great many people to hold a blind philosophy of optimism about history's malleability and compatibility in keep in with American ideals; this optimistic position has turned out to be very short-sighted, and truly significant changes loom ahead for citizens of the United States in the immediate and not too distant future. As Heilbroner postulates, "The problem then . . . is to respond effectively to the technological, political, and economic forces which are bringing about a closing-in of our historic future." He asserts that we can only cope with the impending most difficult period by changing our "structure of power" and also the very "common denominator of values" - two developments for which he does not hold out much hope in the immediate future.

The Idea of Progress. Keeping in mind Bury's thought that the idea of progress is actually of quite recent origin, and also Simpson's warning that we should not assume automatically that an acceptable human criterion is "the *only* criterion of progress and that it has a *general* validity in evolution," Heilbroner decries the tendency of our traditional approach to history that has left us completely unprepared for history's actual radical departure from the "optimistic philosophy [that] equates the movement of history's forces with the idea of progress." He argues further that we have held a limited concept of what progress really is, and that we have mistakenly attempted to "generalize from these specific concepts of progress [e.g., the rise of the level of well-being of the masses in the West] to the larger idea of an all embracing progress of 'society'." Unfortunately, we are told, it would be impossible for us to produce evidence that our "private morality, level of social ethics, and general nobility are in any sense superior to much of the recorded past, if indeed they are equal to the best of American Revolutionary times or to the heights reached in the golden ages of Greece and Rome." Thus, we must ask ourselves: "What happened?" Further, we must search responsibly for *the missing attributes* that have somehow been lacking.

The Future as History in Sport and Physical Education. Keeping in mind that we should now make every effort to promote among our citizens the concepts of 'malleability' and 'flexibility' that will be needed as we approach an era that should be characterized by a readiness to share with our fellow man everywhere based on urgency of need as we work together for long range goals still thousands of years away, what implications do all of these factors have for sport and physical education? First, I believe that the pivotal social forces definitely influence sport and games within our culture, and also that sport and games have reached such a level of acceptance in our society that they themselves have now become

social forces to be reckoned with seriously. Secondly, although sport has typically in the past operated within our schools and colleges as part of a social system known usually as physical education, I feel that more recently physical education has declined as a social system in the United States, while at the same time antithetical intercollegiate and interscholastic athletics, disguised as educational sport and games, have made steadily increasing inroads on the shaky physical education structure. Thus, we must work as professionals to ensure that education in physical education and sport becomes consistent with the long range aims and immediate objectives of an evolving democratic society in which pluralistic philosophies of education are permitted to exist. The charge could well be made that athletics as a social force is working *against* instead of *for* the very values that are being espoused so nobly within the United States culture. Fortunately, it has been impossible up to now to promote strong nationalism in physical education and sport when it must emanate from the goals of a free society, but we must be careful that such a trend is not permitted during normal times at least. And who would dare think of ah-out war with the present weaponry and stockpiles available.

If competitive sport under educational leadership offers benefits for all young men and women, we must strive to make varied activities accessible to all. The lesson from history is that prevailing uneven distribution of wealth brings about a state in which the wealthy will have the most expensive recreational pursuits, and the rest of the people will have less expensive recreational patterns as well as less time in which to pursue play and recreation. Further, a vigorous exercise program and correct nutritional instruction relate directly to two aspects of the ecological crisis. Coaches and physical educators should do all in their power include consideration for sound ecological principles in their own work with young people. We need an environment in which all young people can be involved in vigorous program of physical activity.

Finally, how we cope with the pivotal social forces and the attendant professional concerns will determine whether sport and physical activity are social forces for good or evil -whether they will serve this culture as "socially useful servants." The future of sport and physical education can be shaped by its history. Let's give it a chance.



Straub Hall where most NASSH Sessions were held.