

Puritans and Sport: The Irretrievable Tide of Change

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Between 1630 and 1730 three generations of colonists in Massachusetts Bay entered society, left their mark, and departed. Initiated as a Puritan attempt to preserve the visible church, the colonial enterprise coalesced as a mercantile outpost of the British empire. Throughout the century a transformation in values, or perhaps more precisely the interpretations of these, occurred as well.

The Winthropian generation, the first in the new world, identified values which God had ordained for all his creations -order, hierarchy, mutuality, and inequality. The society served God first, and man, second. Therefore, human behaviors, such as sport, adhered to those values identified in nature and by revelation. Magistrates, covenanters with the people and with God, functioned to uphold the values to govern according to the laws of God and of man. They guarded the liberties of the colonists and insured that the Puritans did not exceed the limits of goodness, justice and honesty.

Records of sport identified the diversity in behavior present within society from the beginning of the plantation. Court, congregational, and legislative records revealed that not all members of the society adhered to the behavioral precedents set by right-thinking men. Frequently the magistrates legislated against the occasions for sport, rather than sport itself, on the Sabbath, at inns and taverns, on the streets, or as speculative endeavors. The records of sport indicated the lack of uniformity in behavior and values, and isolated particular groups contributing to the diversity. Ministers of the second and third generations criticized families, youth, and rulers for failing to uphold the values of the founders.

Within sixty years after the arrival of the *Arabella*, the third generation had assumed its role in the development of the Massachusetts Bay. For many, the service of man replaced the service of God as their foremost duty. Diversity characterized the society, as older values accommodated dichotomous interpretations, and new values appeared. Order no longer reflected the vision of creation, but rather a practical concern for safety and social control. The family had divulged its role as the primary organ for social control, and extra-familial institutions assumed that function. Hierarchy related the class orientation of this society in which wealth and talent determined one's success and position in society. When the interests of the individual did not coincide with those of the community, mutuality succumbed to the rising tide of individualism.

By the end of the third generation, sport reflected different societal values, including one of social class. Sport emerged at times as an organized economic enterprise through which men served themselves rather than God. Sport encompassed the features of a competitive society, one in which only the most talented would succeed and earn rewards determined by men.