

# Sports and the Public Person: Establishing a Reputation and Promoting It in the High Middle Ages

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Moving from a brief analysis of a newly-discovered medieval sports record extracted from the thirteenth-century *Histoire de Guillaume L'Marechal*, this study then proceeds to delineate how sports records and reputations were publicized throughout Europe in the High Middle Ages (for this study, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries). The study focuses on tournament professionals and the methods that were employed to establish their reputations as great sportsmen and how the reputations, once established, were circulated to the nobility of medieval Europe. A variety of primary source material was investigated, especially a selection of *chansons de geste*, troubadour lyrics, and chronicles from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. Of particular importance for the study were the illustrations drawn from the *Histoire de Guillaume L'Marechal*, the songs of the Provençal troubadour Bertran de Born (born ca. 1140), the *Service of Ladies* of the thirteenth-century knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein, the troubadour Peire Vidal (fl. 1180-1205), and the troubadour Duke William IX of Aquitaine.

A knight made his first impact upon the *famulus* (or *mesnie*) of knights. If a warrior became a successful jousting champion within his family of knights, his reputation might be circulated to a wider audience. Participating in tournaments was expected of the warrior nobility of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A knight who entered the lists and was successful would extend his reputation to an even wider audience. By what communicative devices were sporting reputations then circulated to even larger audiences within the feudal world?

The knight's own sporting prowess set the publicity campaign in motion. Then, the ladies who supported these tournament champions would promote their champions through the channels of the female nobility. In addition, heralds and minstrels provided an important element in the creation and promotion of sporting reputations. Heralds could make or break the reputation of an aspiring tournament professional, earning substantial fees from the knight who wished for a widely-acclaimed reputation. Troubadours like Bertran de Born, Peire Vidal, and William IX of Aquitaine wrote songs that were disseminated to knightly audiences. In these songs, the names of knights who had achieved successes as warriors and sportsmen were circulated and reputations were advanced. Finally, once a knight had established a reputation as a great sportsman (with a record of achievements in the tournament), he was expected to demonstrate his chivalry with ostentatious displays for his fellow warriors.