

*Diamonds, Side Lines and Cylinders:*  
An Analysis of the Interrelationship Between  
Sports, The Sporting Goods Industry, and the  
Talking Machine Industry, 1901-1910

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This paper investigates how the seemingly unrelated fields of sports and recorded music overlapped in the early twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century both the sporting goods and talking machine industries were in their infancy, and were often marketed as novelties or toys. By the early 1900s, however, both industries, benefitting from a culture fascinated with technology and leisure, were growing rapidly. Still, the profit margin depended on the successful promotion of the seasonal nature of each industry. Sporting goods sold best during the spring and summer seasons, when customers could enjoy them outdoors, while talking machines and records sold most quickly during the fall and winter as a popular form of indoors entertainment.

Early in the century both industries realized that one way for their retail outlets to profit throughout the year was to stock a wide variety of "side lines" which would ensure profits when the stores' primary products were moving slowly. Publications for each industry, especially *Sporting Goods Dealer* and *Talking Machine World*,

increasingly stressed the importance of carrying the other's products as side lines. Of particular interest are the efforts by the talking machine industry to promote sporting goods. Dealers were urged to hire local athletes as salesmen and to sponsor athletic events, offering records and other talking machine products as prizes. The major talking machine companies produced smaller machines with better motors which, they claimed, would be ideal for vacationers in the woods and on the beach. In addition, a large number of sports-related songs (most notably "Take Me Out to The Ball Game" in 1908) were released.

However, by about 1910 the interest in sporting goods as side lines had slipped considerably. The record industry was a thriving, year-round enterprise. The Victor Talking Machine Company, now the dominant company in the industry, promoted its new Victrola as furniture which had "a place in the parlor," and concentrated on opera and classical performers like Enrico Caruso. In their view sports had no place in the Victorian parlor, and therefore sporting goods products were no longer actively promoted. However, due to the popularity of sporting equipment, this "side line" was not abandoned, it merely diminished in importance.

This paper focuses on industry publications, advertisements, and sports-related songs as source material. Sport historians much acknowledge that sport is only one of many forms of popular cultural expression, and that an examination of sport from the perspective of another entertainment industry can provide valuable insights into how it was perceived by its contemporaries—which surely is one of the most important questions of our field. The paper also reveals insights into the marketing strategies of the early sporting goods industry and its competitors in their battle for the exploding leisure market.