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Penny Sporting News: The Re-Creation of British Sport, 1855-1914

This paper examines the development of sporting news in the penny press and effects on British society between 1855 and 1914. The birth of the penny press in the 1850s enabled sporting news to become a popular periodical genre. Because penny newspapers and their sporting news were productions of Victorian and Edwardian society, interacting with it and influencing it, penny sporting news was a vital element in the re-creation of horse racing and football during the last half of the nineteenth century. These sports and the press became interdependent partners and it is impossible to consider the commercialization of horse racing and football without considering their coverage in the press. By the end of the 1880s, no morning or evening newspaper in pursuit of a mass audience could afford to neglect sporting news.

The availability of “sporting intelligence” in penny newspapers was critical to the increasing popularity of horse racing. Enclosed courses, more competitive races, and the sporting press sparked increasing interest in the sport. By examining newspapers, Parliamentary Papers, and journalists’ memoirs this paper details the new forms of racing information and its development in the penny press. The publication of racing news even allowed workers to read the valuable details necessary to make an informed bet. The growth of a mass betting culture, which emerged after 1850, depended on the racing information published by newspapers. *The Sporting Life*, the *Sportsman* and the *Sporting Chronicle* were the key penny sporting papers that published racing information. Daily general interest newspapers

followed the lead of the sporting press because racing news helped to boost circulation. With inexpensive access to the starting prices, racing programs, and tipsters' predictions about which horses might win, this paper argues that penny newspapers helped to democratize betting in British society.

Newspapers were a key element in the organization of the Football Association and in the transformation of this form of football into the "people's game." By utilizing newspapers, periodicals, and contemporary accounts of sport, this paper explains the role of newspapers in the re-creation of association football. The press became a link to the game for followers beginning in the 1880s as they read the new halfpenny evening papers' football edition. These special editions of Saturday evening newspapers became the medium for the language of soccer. Readers could follow the performances of their favorite clubs and players while also learning about rival clubs and players. The weekly attention to both amateur and professional football helped to sell the game and increase its popularity as sporting news facilitated the collective experience of competitive soccer on a national scale.
