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Sport as a Symbolic Hunt: A Synopsis of a Theory of the Origin and Nature of Sport Based on Paleolithic Hunting

Sport as a Symbolic Hunt addresses issues of the origin and nature of sport. The interdisciplinary approach uses a historical analysis supplemented with anthropological and educational research in developing the theory of sport that is based on Paleolithic hunting. This theory explains the origin of prehistoric proto-sport, which is defined as sport-like activities that do not qualify as true sport but contribute, to its development. These proto-sports are identified as: teaching the young to hunt, practicing component hunting skills, and elementary forms of recreational hunting. These proto-sports lead to the development of informal true sport, which involves rules that are simply agreed upon by contestants, in the form of recreational hunting in Cro-Magnon times. Formal true sport with written rules or a non-participant judge determining the winner of the contest has evidence for development in the ancient period in the form of secondary contests based on component hunting skills. Sport is defined as a physically active and competitive rule-governed contest that is based on hunting, its derivative forms and related skills, performed in the context of play.

The composite nature of sport, being part play and part work, is related to a primate's propensity for play while performing subsistence hunting as a primary means of survival. Play is important in generally providing a context for sport but sport itself is a complex cultural activity that is comprised of autotelic and heterotelic components. Prehistoric tools and

weapons used in hunting and fishing – clubs, thrown spears, bows and arrows, projectiles, boats and nets develop into sport equipment. Hunting codes and rituals were instrumental in creating rules and organizing sporting events. The historical exclusion of women and ethnic groups from sport, results from archaic exclusionary participation codes in hunting. Roots of physical education are found in Paleolithic training of the young to hunt. The “sport hero” is interpreted as a symbolic master of animals which is connected to the epic tale, myths of hunting deities, Cro-Magnon shamanistic practices and perhaps ultimately to an alpha dominance ranking quest among predators. Primary sources included ancient sculptures, coins and sport equipment as well as government documents and portions of televised sportscasts. By examining these and secondary sources, it is concluded that in Symbolic Hunt Theory, all sport may be interpreted as a symbolic hunt.
