

Foreword

Robert Edelman

Globalization and Sport in Historical Context Conference
University of California, San Diego
March 2005

Lead Organizer, Professor Robert Edelman, History
Co-organizers, Professors Daniel Widener, Frank Biess, History;
Brett St. Louis, Ethnic Studies

On a Saturday morning, a bleary-eyed family in Southern California wakes at seven to gather in front of the television. They will be watching a soccer game from Newcastle, Manchester, London or Scunthorpe. Later that weekend, they can imagine themselves, god-like, watching down on the world of sport, able to take in games from Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. At the same time, gamblers in Malaysia may be viewing the same games on which they most likely have bet heavily. In order to make informed wagers, they have scoured hundred of websites on the Internet for information about the teams playing that day. Some of the more powerful of them may have even sought to bribe players in England or elsewhere to throw the game.

Today, scouts from Europe's wealthiest soccer clubs scour the backwaters of Africa for talent. Men, performing a similar function for hockey teams, risk their lives to fly to provincial towns in Siberia or the Urals in search of young Russians. Thousands of Dominican children, inspired by the success of their older countrymen, compete for the few places in baseball academies run by major league baseball clubs. Cricket fans in India and Sri Lanka can take in test matches in Australia, South Africa and England and vice versa. A young basketball player in Inner Mongolia is inspired by telecasts of the National Basketball Association and winds up playing professionally in Texas. Sports mega-events like the soccer World Cup and the Olympics draw the most massive global television audiences imaginable. The 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Winter Games attracted 2.1 billion viewers. The soccer World Cup, held that summer, was seen by 1.3 billion viewers who tuned in repeatedly over the course of a month. During the entire competition the total number of hours watched by these viewers was 49 billion. Websites for every imaginable game and team in every league and competition in the world exist for those hungry for knowledge. The seemingly insatiable world-wide appetite for sports has been one of the leading sources of content driving the growth of the technologies of globalization.

Yet, if the technologies are novel, the processes of sporting globalization are not new. Scholars now question that the rise of modernity was something that emanated from what was once called the metropolis or, in some cases, an Anglo-American center. On the other hand, there is still unanimous academic agreement that the phenomenon of modern sport emerged in Great Britain in the late eighteenth century and was organized and developed in the nineteenth. By the end of that century and early into the twentieth, the British were spreading their games to the rest of the

world through their Empire. Colonial administrators brought cricket to South Asia and the West Indies. Along with cricket, the settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa took up the public school game of rugby. The carriers of Britain's informal commercial empire, merchants, engineers, technicians and skilled workmen, traveling with deflated balls and rule books in their luggage, took the game of soccer to such far-flung places as Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Spain, France, Germany, Italy and the edges of the Russian Empire.

After the First World War, advances in transportation, communication and construction made it possible for sports to expand their audience immensely. During the 1930's, the Olympics grew from glorified field days for the elite into huge festivals of youth and powerful displays of a nation's power. Later, during the Cold War, the Soviet-US rivalry spread competing versions of sport to the rest of the world, creating dueling scenarios of globalization. All this has brought us to a new post-Communist, thoroughly capitalist kind of globalization that is highly contested and increasingly questioned. Sport and the moneys generated by it have come to comprise an increasingly large part of the US and world economies. The U.S. sport economy (not including fishing, camping, boating and fitness clubs) generates more than \$212 billion annually. This is greater than the American agricultural industry. It is twice the size of the auto industry and seven times the movie industry. All this activity has attracted the attention of academics, and sports studies has exploded as a field of serious inquiry. As one Cambridge don recently told a colleague, not without an edge, "Sport, it seems, is the new film."

For two days during March 2005, a group of some twenty academics and two business people came together at the University of California, San Diego to share their work and research on these very questions. The academics were at various levels of their careers, ranging from graduate students to senior scholars. The papers were read in advance and discussed extensively. The authors have taken those comments and made use of them as they have revised their writing. Much of what was presented was work-in-progress, and several papers are soon to appear in print in other venues. The conference papers were all contributions to the study of sporting globalization and its discontents. Readers should derive much useful information and thinking from them.

Thanks to the Dean of Humanities, University of California, San Diego and the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles for supporting this conference.