

Sport and the Media: The Emergence of a Major Research Field

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In the United States, according to Kinkema and Harris, 'there are occasions when as many as ten sporting events are televised simultaneously'.¹ Many recent developments within mass sport have been guided by economic considerations that can easily be traced back to the media, and especially television. Sport for its part has also transformed the media.²

The relationship between media and sport has become of particular interest to media scholars over the last decade. However, as sport itself has been of interest in a variety of other disciplines, the study of the ways in which media and sport interact crosses boundaries and can be found in literature concerned with the sociology of sport, history of sport, gender studies, cultural studies, journalism, leisure studies and beyond. For scholars interested in the media in particular, sport is important as a popular content of the media, which can also shed light on a range of related issues central to media studies. Much of the writing on sport and the media addresses general issues within media studies, such as the vast field of representation and identity (some commentators see sport's most important contribution to society as symbolic) and globalization, as well as aspects of the political economy of the media (here the focus may well be institutional or economic, rather than concerned with symbolic processes).

'Theory' as a category is addressed explicitly at the end of this collection. Neil Blain suggests some approaches to theorizing the relationship between the symbolic functioning of sport and the domains of culture, and of media culture in particular. He argues that the symbolic development of sport is most satisfactorily comprehended when culture, sport, media, economics and ideology are all maintained as strong terms in the debate. This is an argument against compound constructions that subsume sport beneath the enveloping category of

media ('media-sport' or 'mediasport'). The argument that emerges at the end of this volume is that sport's dispersal through various zones of culture and modes of reception reconstitutes it as a primary cultural force, even if the media drive some of its central cultural and social roles. The rest of this introduction puts the broad field of 'theory' on hold to concentrate on some individual topics (where appropriate, in the context of their own specific theoretical dimensions).

There is a textual emphasis in the study of mediated sport that is in keeping with an emphasis existing in media studies in general. However, two further sub-topics of media sport have also been explored, albeit to a lesser extent. These are the media production of sport and the matter of audiences for mediated sport. It is important to stress that the boundaries between these three domains (textual, production, reception) are often blurred and although they can be discussed separately, the fact that they interact with one another in practice has been recognized in much recent research into media sport.

In this collection, three contributions address formal concerns in the television of sport. Nancy Rivenburgh looks at recent phenomena such as 'plausibly live' television reality and 'remote production'. Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes examine further recent developments such as interactivity. Hans-Joerg Stiehler and Mirko Marr consider the television rhetoric of national soccer games. Hugh O'Donnell looks in detail at an example of that under-analyzed sport medium, radio, considering structural and discursive aspects of a football phone-in.

Three of these contributions also consider questions of representation and identity in sport. Overall, and despite the broad range of this collection, the sub-headings below are grouped around this very large domain of research; though the authors just mentioned, and Alina Bernstein's interview with Alex Gilady, also address economic and technological matters.

The categories explored here are necessarily selective. For example, we have not included a category on religious identity and media sport. In the context of countries such as Britain and France, analyses of Muslim identity and sport are still too few. This fact is partially redressed by Amir Saeed's contribution on Muhammad Ali and his Muslim fan base, which we refer to in more than one subsection below. We note that in writing about sport and the media, 'race' has figured particularly as an American theme. But while some of this race-based

identity writing does indeed hold much relevance in the UK, France and elsewhere, the question of religion-based identity – especially Muslim identity – is at least as important where the development of British and French and some other European cultures are concerned. This is likewise bound to be of growing importance in North America and elsewhere. However, the current volume of writing associated with these themes determines the categories below.

STUDIES OF MEDIA AND SPORT: CENTRAL THEMES

The study of media and sport has developed mainly since 1980, flourishing in the 1990s. Over the past decade interest in sport in general and specifically its interaction with the media has grown immensely, as the long list of publications in this area testifies. There are many non-academic books in this area, including biographies and autobiographies of athletes like Michael Jordan³ and broadcasters like Les Keiter,⁴ and there are a variety of professional guides aimed at teaching the ‘techniques, skills, and operations necessary for successful entry into the field of sportscasting’.⁵

There has also been a very rapidly growing quantity of academic writing. Many publications concerned with sport in general also include chapters focusing on mediated sport; a reflection on the fact that sport and the media have become associated to such an extent that it is often difficult to discuss sport in modern society without acknowledging its relationship with the media. Indeed, in recent years the study of media sport has become a central theme within the sociology of sport⁶ and other books on sport generally also address the media.⁷ For example, Schaffer and Smith suggest that the articles in their volume⁸ ‘blur the boundaries between sports and other forms of popular culture’⁹ – they often engage with the media.

Toby Miller examines the way sport allows men and women (although mostly men) to consider their looks, vitality and their relationship to their gender in ways that would be taboo in any other context.¹⁰ His discussion pays special attention to the way celebrity is constructed around the world and considers the role of the media in relation to the body and the nation.

Academic journals, often not especially focused on media matters, nonetheless feature articles about media and sport-related studies.¹¹ Recent media-focused books on sport suggest the range and

distribution of topics typical of the field, with production-orientated work, textual analysis and audience-related research.¹² Much recent research into mediated sport is concerned with the marketing and commodification of sport; with media treatments of gender, race and sport; with nationalism and globalization; and with violence, fandom and audience experiences.

Multi-disciplinary approaches to mediated sport, such as Garry Whannel's marshalling of media studies and sociological/cultural studies perspectives, have been increasingly common.¹³ Whannel considers the ways in which masculinity and male identity are represented through images of sport and sport stars. This historical and case study-based book traces media narratives of sporting stars from the pre-radio era to the present specialist television channels, newspaper supplements and websites, exploring a range of masculine types, from muscular Christians to 'New Lads'. In his contribution to the present collection, Whannel argues that, in an era in which both moralities and masculinities are perceived by many to be in crisis, sport holds a central place in contemporary culture and sports stars become the focal point of discourses of masculinity and morality.

Boyle and Haynes' recent book synthesizes a slightly different series of subject approaches in an analytical account of how the media have come to exercise considerable domination over how sport is organized, performed and regarded.¹⁴ The strand of media studies that investigates the business dimension of the media is a prominent feature of their work, which examines themes such as the function of sport as a central media content provider and sport's relationships with sponsorship. Their account is broadly based, marrying textual, theoretical and political-economic dimensions.

In the present collection Boyle and Haynes juxtapose a number of developments in the technology and delivery of sports content in the media with considerations both of the commercial drives behind sport and also the cultural importance of sport as 'a rich arena of myth, image, narrative and a compulsive world of story-telling'. Their themes articulate a growing concern that the values of business, especially international conglomerate business, in both cases often closely associated with the media development of sport, sit very uneasily beside traditional sporting values; just as the globalizing world of conglomerate sport presents challenges to its local dimensions. Rivenburgh's analysis in this collection (further discussed below) of

The Emergence of a Major Research Field

5

recent transformations in the nature of media and business relationships with the Olympic Games, raises the possibility that the Olympics may have become subordinate to the larger advertising and entertainment industry.

Alina Bernstein's interview with Alex Gilady is a point of view from a media executive who has played the most central of roles in the international television of sport. The concerns expressed by Boyle, Haynes and Rivenburgh are not his. On the assumption that it is good for academic writers to engage with views from the industry, the interview with Gilady presents an especially forceful view of the logic of a commercial, globalizing approach to television sport. Gilady puts a number of topics into an interesting alternative perspective. When asked, for example, about Britain's Channel Four's attempts to generate interest in American football, Gilady observes 'Leave it, that is a negligible sort of rating, all of Channel 4 is negligible'. When asked about minority sports on television, his judgement is that 'Most sports are not interesting ... The amount of sports that are attractive to both the advertisers and the viewers is very small, very small'.

It has been a significant feature of the growth of academic study of the media that despite often quite well-developed links between academics and media professionals there often remains a large gulf between the values expressed by each party. The interview with Alex Gilady is an important statement from a sports media entrepreneur, which represents the view from the world of market forces. If it jars with some other contributions in this volume, well and good, because the existence of dissonant values at the heart of the media-sport relationship is to an extent the concern of nearly every contribution here.

GENDER, MEDIA AND SPORT

The notion that in sport, physical and biological differences interact with social and cultural assumptions about gender has been central to many publications within the sociology of sport.¹⁵ In recent years numerous publications have explored the role of the media in this context. Feminist writers, in particular, clearly agree that the media play a central ideological role, not only in 'reflecting', but also reinforcing, existing ideas about gender.

That 'gender' has chiefly meant a focus on women should come as no surprise. It is 'consistent with the lack of attention paid to other

dominant groups'.¹⁶ This is also true for the discussion of race (see below), which devotes relatively little attention to whites and whiteness. However, more recently, in the instance of gender, the study of men and masculinity has emerged although it is still clearly influenced by feminist thought (see below).

Women, Media and Sport

A feminist critique of sport emerged in the late 1970s and began to flourish during the early 1980s. Feminist studies of the time explored the sex differences in patterns of athletic socialization and whether sport as a social institution naturalizes men's power and privilege over women. They concluded that the marginalization and trivialization of female athletes served to reproduce the domination of men over women.¹⁷ During the 1980s a dialogue between critical theorists in sport sociology and feminism resulted in recognition by some scholars that the concept of hegemony should be employed to analyze gender relations in sport.¹⁸ A number of authors argued that perhaps more than any other social institution, sport perpetuates male superiority and female inferiority.

Interestingly, Dowling argues on the basis of research that women are as biologically capable as men of excelling in sports.¹⁹ Over the last decades women have made many advances in organized, competitive, high performance spectator sport, particularly in Western societies and most clearly in the United States.²⁰ Feminist writers, however, argue that the media do not reflect this change and so inhibit sponsorship.

Existing work on women and mediated sport tends to focus on two main issues: first, the quantity of coverage; and, second, the media portrayal of women's sports and female athletes.²¹ Recent edited books examining sport and the media tend to dedicate a substantial proportion of articles to these issues²² and, as mentioned, related articles have appeared in academic sports journals, as well as journals with a feminist orientation.

Coverage

During the 1980s and most of the 1990s, research showed that the media persisted in covering mainly male athletes. A consistent finding is the under-reporting of female athletes and their sporting events throughout all mass media,²³ for example, in 1994 men were found to receive 93.8 per cent of coverage on US television.²⁴ Since the media

are seen as helping to shape values,²⁵ this severe under-representation creates the impression that women athletes are of little importance in the sporting world. The claim that women tend to be 'symbolically annihilated'²⁶ is borne out by later studies, such as Koivula's exploration of televised sports in Sweden during 1995/96²⁷ and these findings likewise supported earlier studies offering similar indications.²⁸

Yet some changes in the quantity of coverage of women's sports have been traced in major sporting events, particularly the Olympic Games: 'On its face, NBC's coverage of the 1996 Olympics seems balanced, with women receiving almost as much airtime as men.'²⁹ Among other findings Eastman and Billings also found that in the same summer Olympics, women's and men's events had virtually equal proportions of clock time and virtually identical numbers of medal events were covered.³⁰ However, in both examples, many qualifications emerge, for example over restrictions on the range of sports in which women seem ideologically acceptable.

Eastman and Billings argue that their results support the notion that NBC executives were concerned about the appearance of gender equity and that this concern certainly had an impact on some aspects of the telecast, namely those under their direct control, such as length of coverage and promos within prime time. They do however emphasize that, when it came to on-site reporters, the coverage was not balanced at all. Even in 1996 male athletes and men's sports continued to receive more salient coverage of all types than female athletes or women's events. Indeed, as both sets of researchers point out, the predominantly male identity of hosts, reporters and producers might be a primary cause of knowing or unknowing bias.

Women's tennis is one clear exception; a women's event to which television dedicates much airtime. In 1999, for instance, the American cable channel HBO devoted an unprecedented 70 per cent of its coverage to this sport.³¹

The Media Portrayal of Female Athletes in Women's Sports

Numbers (such as hours of coverage) are not the only important issue to consider in the context of women and mediated sport. Qualitative differences also occur although explanations as to how and why this happens vary.

Sabo and Curry Jansen argue that 'the skills and strengths of women

athletes are often devalued in comparison to cultural standards linked to dominant standards of male athletic excellence, which emphasize the cultural equivalents of hegemonic masculinity: power, self-control, success, agency, and aggression'.³² Furthermore, whereas male athletes are 'valorized, lionized, and put on cultural pedestals'³³ female athletes are infantilized by sport commentators who refer to them as 'girls' or 'young ladies' – male athletes are 'men'. Messner, Duncan and Jensen found that commentators referred to female tennis players by their first names 52.7 per cent of the time and to men only 7.8 per cent of the time. While male athletes tended to be described in terms of strengths and success, female athlete's physical strengths were often neutralized by ambivalent language.³⁴

Furthermore, while the male performance is often linked with power metaphors (like war) the coverage of female athletes is often framed within stereotypes that emphasize their appearance and attractiveness rather than athletic skill. The media tend to focus on female athletes as sexual beings rather than serious performers.³⁵ It is argued that the sexualization of female athletes trivializes them and robs them of athletic legitimacy. In their study of the 1996 Olympics, Eastman and Billings found that although the presence of gender stereotyping was not as overwhelming as expected, nonetheless 'as traditional gender stereotyping suggests, the descriptors applied to women athletes contained more commentary about physical appearance than the descriptors applied to men athletes'³⁶ and 'what can be labeled unfortunate stereotyping crept into the appearance descriptors'³⁷ in the network's pre-produced profiles. Further studies have focused on different practices through which the media construct female athleticism as not only 'other than', but as 'lesser than' the male's.³⁸

More recently, however, Eastman and Billings noted that the network's 'hosts and on-site reporters were careful to attribute women's successes and failures to the same characteristics as men's successes and failures'.³⁹ According to Jones, Murrell and Jackson, in their study of the 1996 Olympic Games, for female athletes playing 'female-appropriate' sports, there was a trend toward print media accounts that focused more on describing their performance than personality or appearance.⁴⁰ Then again, Koivula's study is less positive⁴¹ and Jones, Murrell and Jackson's findings indicate that the 'beauty' and 'grace' of the female gymnasts were still the main point of

emphasis, despite the US taking gold in the event.⁴² In his study of the representation of women in football-related stories during the course of the 1996 European Championships in the British popular press, Harris writes that the message that is still being portrayed to women and young girls is that sport is an essentially male activity in which women are afforded only subordinate and/or highly sexualized roles.⁴³

Based on their analysis of television coverage of the first Women's National Basketball Association season in 1997, Stanley Wearden and Pamela Creedon's contribution to the present volume finds mixed messages in the account offered by television advertising. Although they detect some movement toward a greater number of non-stereotypical images of women in some product categories than in earlier studies, this finding is complicated by the fact that 'a new form of ghettoization' of women could be underway whereby strong or powerful women may be imaged in the context of sport, while in other areas of life women are expected to behave within the limits of traditional ideologies. While pilot work on commercials for the 2000 season seemed to indicate a slow progressive shift, the overall sense that emerges from their study is of a continuing restriction in the way that women are imaged in sport culture.

Some women are scarcely portrayed at all. Rinella Cere has had to engage in detective work to try to uncover the nature of the female Italian *ultrà* soccer fan for this collection. Her analysis has required her to probe both widely and deeply to try to elicit data on a sizeable phenomenon of considerable cultural and sociological interest. 'Women's *ultrà* support is practically invisible in the mass media, rarely are they discussed in the sports pages of the national newspapers or even in the three sport-dedicated dailies available in Italy'. This is equally true of both radio and television, despite the fact that women now increasingly present sport programmes in Italy. It is not only in the media, but also in some academic literature that Cere detects a process of suppression. Her account therefore not only raises questions about patterns of representation in sport, but also revisits a broader epistemological question in the social sciences about the values that preside over the construction of knowledge.

Men and Sport

It can still be argued that the hegemonic form of masculinity (which provides normative attributes against which other forms of masculinity

are measured) still means to a great extent avoiding 'feminine behaviour' by focusing on success, being emotionally distant and taking risks.⁴⁴ It has been argued that the 'study of masculinity inevitably leads us back to issues of femininity and sexual orientations and the links between gender, and race, class and national identity, to the construction of individual subjectivities'.⁴⁵ Sport has been viewed by some as one of men's last 'chances' to escape from the growing ambiguity of masculinity in daily life.⁴⁶

Burstyn notes the centrality of professional sports in popular culture in industrial countries, especially 'men's culture'.⁴⁷ Sport in her account is something around which men gather regularly to celebrate exaggerated forms of masculinity ('hypermasculinity'). Offering a critical history of the institutionalization of sport in schools and in male popular culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Burstyn also addresses the developing interaction between (male) professional sports and the mass media.

Indeed, over recent years some scholars have addressed sport as a male preserve and a source of the production and reproduction of masculine identity. McKay, Messner and Sabo consider three central questions:⁴⁸

- How can the study of masculinities in sport be integrated with critical feminist studies?
- How can researchers deal with the tendency in critical sport sociology to over-emphasize negative outcomes? And,
- How can the study of masculinity and gender best be consolidated with analyses of race and ethnicity, social class and sexual orientation?

Men, Masculinity, Media and Sport

Sabo and Curry Jansen observed a decade ago that although 'masculinity and sport have been culturally equated in the United States there is strangely very little research into this area'.⁴⁹ In the literature that does exist it has been noted that the sports media concentrate on success stories about men and, more specifically, on the theme of fighting back from adversity, like injury or drug addiction.⁵⁰ Indeed, 'the media do not ordinarily focus on men who fail to measure up in sports or life'.⁵¹

When male athletes fall from grace the coverage becomes a site for

The Emergence of a Major Research Field

11

testing the challenges a fallen hero poses to the legitimacy of dominant cultural values. However, 'the net effect of the extended coverage is to rescue hegemonic masculinity by framing the transgressor as an anomaly, whether as a cheat, an impostor, a tragic victim of flawed judgment, or a compulsive personality'.⁵² After the American basketball player Irwin 'Magic' Johnson announced that he was HIV positive, the media coverage depicted him as 'Tragic Magic', flawed in terms of personal strength, 'accommodating' his female groupies and sleeping with (one) too many of them.⁵³

It is similarly argued that sports programming represents male athletes in relation to 'competition, strength and discipline'.⁵⁴ More specifically, they tend to be described by metaphors such as 'pounds, misfire, force, big guns, fire away, drawing first blood, or battles'.⁵⁵ Indeed, Duncan, Messner and Williams found that whereas commentators described male basketball players as 'attacking the hoop', female basketball players 'went to' the hoop!⁵⁶

When discussing 'masculinities' in the plural, it emerges that non-hegemonic forms of masculinity tend to be marginalized. In fact, 'alternative or counter-hegemonic masculinities are not ordinarily acknowledged or represented by sports media'.⁵⁷ A clear example supporting this argument is the very minimal coverage awarded to the Gay Olympics. Moreover, the media tends to ignore the fact that some male athletes are gay.

Violence on-screen, like that in real life, is perpetrated overwhelmingly by males. Males constitute the majority of the audience for violent films, as well as violent sports such as [American] football and hockey. However, what is being 'sold' to the audience is not just violence, but rather a glamorized form of violent masculinity.⁵⁸

The concept of the male sports hero as a role model was brought into severe doubt in both the cases of Mike Tyson and O.J. Simpson. In the case of Tyson, Rowe notes that 'the economic structure and cultural complexion of professional sport interact in a manner that produces problematic forms of [especially masculine] sports celebrity'.⁵⁹ The case of Simpson again brought the problem of gender violence to the forefront of America's social agenda and also called the concept of sports hero into question.⁶⁰ Burstyn argues that the television coverage of professional men's sports offers an arena in which male athletes

become public heroes, contributing to 'hypermasculine' variants of identity.⁶¹

Muhammad Ali, whose celebrity and symbolic operation are analyzed in this volume by Amir Saeed, embodies both a considerably more complex set of values and has in general – though, as will be seen, not always – enjoyed much more sympathetic treatment from the media than Tyson. Ali's significance for this collection lies in his high visibility within a globalizing trend affecting collective identity, specifically in relation to international discourses of race and religion. But 'Ali-ologists', as Saeed observes, rightly tend to see him as an inclusive figure. His symbolic operation has ranged very widely, not only within American culture and counter-culture generally but, as Saeed's account makes clear, across boundaries of religions, nations and cultures. Largely because of Ali's developed symbolic functioning, his mythic connection with the kind of masculinity represented by a Tyson or a Foreman has always been constrained: he has transcended this category effortlessly (he was sometimes constructed in the media as 'threatened' by the 'brutality' of boxing opponents).

Stanley Matthews, a strikingly different but symbolically potent sportsman, part of whose myth emerges from a clash between the values of the media age and an earlier era of sport, has been metaphorically important largely within national boundaries. But like Ali, Matthews embodies a complex range of values. Garry Whannel analyzes the attribution – some of it self-attribution – to Matthews of a particular form of working-class masculinity that, by definition, is seen as sufficiently lost in the past to merit nostalgia. As with Ali, it is difficult to separate the elements within the Matthews myth. Just as it is necessary to discuss the fact that Ali is a Muslim in association with the fact that he is a black American, Matthews' masculinity is hard to detach from his working-class identity or the presumed personal character of Staffordshire and the Potteries. In Whannel's account the construction, not least by the media, of the version of Matthews by which he is remembered, is thoroughly revealed.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE MEDIA

The question of the role that the media might assume in the construction of collectivities, with specific focus on nations, has been addressed by several writers.⁶² Dayan and Katz point out the

The Emergence of a Major Research Field

13

importance of what they refer to as 'festive television', including 'epic contests' of politics and sports, most notably the Olympics, in the construction of national dimensions of identity.⁶³ They argue that national identity is a sense of membership, similarity, equality and familiarity, though they perceive these media events as portraying 'an idealized version of society, reminding society of what it aspires to rather than what it is'.⁶⁴ Other writing concentrates just as much on the adversarial mutual constructions of national identity in World Cup football.⁶⁵

In their account of the media in Britain, Scannell and Cardiff refer to the nation as an abstract collectivity, which is 'too big to be grasped by individuals'.⁶⁶ The sense of belonging, the 'we-feeling' of the community, has to be continually engendered by opportunities for identification, for which the media are potent agents, sport providing important symbolic material for the facilitation of such emotions.⁶⁷

The significance of sport's contribution to the development and reinforcement of national identity has been underlined by many writers.⁶⁸ If 'national identity' is a popular focus, 'nationalism' and 'nationality' are also sometimes accompanying, if not always specified, categories.⁶⁹

'Athletes and teams become our symbolic warriors defending the honor of our schools, towns or nation.'⁷⁰ Sport is one legitimate arena in which national flags can be raised and other patriotic rituals exercised.⁷¹ Norbert Elias notes that 'sport continues to constitute an area of social activity in which overt emotional engagement remains publicly acceptable'.⁷² He further observes that 'a level of national sentiment' can be found in the sports section of a newspaper which is hard to imagine elsewhere. Anthony Smith points out that 'other types of collective identity – class, gender, race, religion – may overlap or combine with national identity but they rarely succeed in undermining its hold'.⁷³ It is worth observing that a few scholars extend this argument so much as to suggest that sport is in fact a substitute for war.⁷⁴

International professional sport provides a compelling means by which 'the nation can be represented as positive and dynamic'.⁷⁵ This 'heady cocktail of sport and national chauvinism'⁷⁶ is not seductive to all sections of the population and in certain domains, such as the English tabloids, it can be unprepossessing.⁷⁷ Actually winning a major international competition provides a great opportunity for the nation

to celebrate, though the role of such victories varies from nation to nation. O'Donnell and Blain point out that the French chastised themselves after winning the World Cup for lacking the right kind of national character to celebrate it.⁷⁸ Increasing attention has been conferred upon the role of national teams and their importance for national prestige, especially as the media celebrate nationalism and national identity when it comes to the coverage of sporting competitions.⁷⁹ Blain *et al.* concluded that 'the most universal form of expression we have found is the notion of the nation as one sentient being'.⁸⁰

'Sports have frequently been used to promote political socialization within countries and to establish prestige and power in international relationships'.⁸¹ The Olympic Games have been the focus of much of the writing in this context and indeed, the link between collective identity and sport has been traced by some to the Greek Olympic Games. Since that time, athletes and teams have served as important sources of collective identity.⁸² Much more recently, one of the first acts of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia as separate nations was to establish Olympic committees.⁸³ Hosting the Olympics is a particularly potent sign of national success; the 2000 Olympics conferred upon Sydney (and, more widely, Australia) a confirmation of grand assessments of progress.⁸⁴

Despite their potential for producing discourses and imagery of internationalism,⁸⁵ large sports events like the Olympics also serve as occasions for national 'flag-waving'.⁸⁶ Tomlinson proposes that large-scale international sporting events embody fundamental tensions seen in bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC),⁸⁷ seeking to represent their events as catalysts to international understanding, but at the same time producing platforms for 'the public fanning of nationalist sentiments'.⁸⁸ Tomlinson suggests a colourful metaphor: it is 'as if nations wanted to reach out to each other for a handshake, while simultaneously puffing out their chests in self-satisfaction'.⁸⁹

Media coverage of international sports gatherings sometimes promotes them as a form of war.⁹⁰ Despite the Olympic Opening Ceremony's showcasing of rituals and icons meant to symbolize peace, friendship and international community, its structure and design also promote a nationalistic perspective.⁹¹ Erikson actually views this as a stylized introduction to a metaphorical war between nation-states,⁹²

while Moragas Spa *et al.* believe that, 'at the very least, participation in the Olympics is seen as a presentation of national membership, ability and identity in a global arena as expressed through athletic teams'.⁹³

Images of Nations

Studies show that there is an extremely thin line between generalizations and 'crude national stereotypes'.⁹⁴ Moreover, 'stereotyping can make an easy transition into out-and-out racism'.⁹⁵ Blain *et al.* report the findings of a number of large-scale studies⁹⁶ of the images of nations through sports coverage in the European media.⁹⁷ In their studies of the press coverage of Italia '90 and the press and television coverage of Wimbledon 1991, Blain *et al.* found many examples of stereotypical images of nations and athletes who participated in these competitions. Furthermore, their interpretation of these findings holds that the behaviour of both the participants and their fans read like 'an index of the nature of national characteristics'.⁹⁸ They found that although the most extreme cases of stereotypical portrayal of 'other' nations could be found in the English popular press, other national media have their own versions of this tendency, a clear example being of the coverage of the German team in the 1990 Football World Cup.⁹⁹ Throughout Europe the team was found to be presented as the personification of 'discipline, dedication to work and reliability'.¹⁰⁰ They were presented as a 'machine team' and often in metaphors suggesting military character. The media were baffled if German players displayed 'flair' (a Latin quality) and concocted elaborate explanations of such inconsistencies.

As well national teams, individual athletes are often portrayed as representing their nation. Nowadays, top performers in the same teams may often compete against each other for star status and to enhance their earning power.¹⁰¹ In the Olympic Games it might seem obvious that individual athletes 'play for their country', but even in clearly individual competitions such as Wimbledon national identity exerts an important role in the coverage, although it is less evident than in national-team sports.¹⁰²

The national dimension in the sport-media relationship is discussed by several contributors to this collection, including Hugh O'Donnell (see below) and Garry Whannel, and it is present in the contributions by Nancy Rivenburgh and Rinella Cere, while the complexities of religious-national identities are addressed by Amir Saeed.

The contribution most emphatically focused on the national dimension is Hans-Joerg Stiehler and Mirko Marr's innovative account of media responses to the failures of the German national soccer team. Employing methods from the field of social psychology and basing their approach particularly upon attribution research, Stiehler and Marr pursue the thesis that in certain circumstances sport coverage exhibits 'pseudo-scientific', or what they prefer to call 'para-rational', characteristics, for which the focus on one's own national side tends to cause problems, compromising the desired appearance of 'objectivity'. They discuss data from World and European championships in 1994, 1996 and 1998 (adding some data from 2000) in order to analyze the institutionalization of communication about sport in television and examine the logic of media interpretations of sport results. Stiehler and Marr produce detailed data on both formal aspects of television coverage and the pattern of attributions that emerges amidst the desire to produce a coherent and simultaneously gratifying account of the national team's performance – not an easy task in the light of the German side's performances in some tournaments over the last decade. Underlying the media constructions is a shared sense of what the German national side is supposed to be good at (strength, discipline, team spirit) and a shared surprise at the under-performance of what is normally, inside and outside Germany, seen as a 'tournament team', supposedly stronger with every round.

Though Stiehler and Marr's analysis represents a groundbreaking approach to understanding sports culture, the domain of the national in writing about sport and the media is frequently addressed. We lack the space here to try and explore the relatively undeveloped field of social class and collective identity in sport, though some references have been made above (for example) to research on the English tabloids, which does foreground class. However, the contributions to this collection by O'Donnell and Whannel redress the balance by emphasizing the enduring class basis upon which sport in the UK requires (like the society and culture generally) to be understood, though both are careful to give due emphasis to a range of demographic factors.

O'Donnell's investigation of the themes and customs emerging from a popular Scottish commercial radio football programme – an address to a neglected area in literature on the sport media – uncovers a nexus of values associating class identity with masculinity and

propriety, just as Whannel discovers in responses to the death of Matthews. O'Donnell notes a broad range of demographic characteristics in the cultural context and discourses of the programme, including religion, nationality, age and urban and rural provenances. His account ranges widely from the popular role of this and similar programmes to arguments about their political and democratic significance and the discussion is embedded in socio-linguistics, drawing a variety of international comparisons.

At the other end of the spectrum from this determinedly local media programme are the Olympics, as presented in this collection by Nancy Rivenburgh's study of 'media events'. It is the global reach of the Games on television that makes them so attractive to television conglomerates, sponsors and advertisers. Rivenburgh predicts that 'international mega-events', which she observes are phenomena that reach into other areas of provision well beyond sport, will in future multiply in the competition to achieve the status of 'global media event'. Citing coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial and world reactions to the deaths of Diana, Princess of Wales and John F. Kennedy Jr., Rivenburgh points out that 'the increased linkage and co-operation among international news organizations, coupled with a greater worldwide awareness of international celebrities and political actors, allow for media events to more easily emerge out of news coverage'.

RACE, SPORT AND THE MEDIA

The term 'race' is problematic, not least as 'there is little or no biological evidence to support the use of the term at all'.¹⁰³ In fact, it can be argued that 'there is no such thing as "race"', however 'there is racism'.¹⁰⁴ Put differently, 'race' is far from an innocent term; it carries much ideological weight.

The issue of race in relation to sport has been dealt with in academic writing since the 1960s, but has been most evident in the literature (mainly American) of recent years.¹⁰⁵ Several researchers deal with aspects of this issue, including higher education and the plight of black male athletes¹⁰⁶ and the cultural diversity on campus.¹⁰⁷ A special issue of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* has also focused on race and sport.¹⁰⁸

It is important to emphasize that much of the discussion of race in the media studies literature that originates from Britain and the US

refers to media images of black people, so much so that the term 'race' is often assumed to have restricted reference. Existing studies in the media field generally tend to look at the representation of black people in television texts, mainly 'in drama and light entertainment. There is very little information available on the coverage of black people in news, current affairs and documentaries'.¹⁰⁹ Much of this work has called attention to the ways in which black people in the media have remained largely invisible, marginalized to the point of insignificance, or have been limited to specific stereotypes.¹¹⁰

When considering the media's role in relation to race and sport, Sabo and Curry Jansen point out that:

Media images of black male athletes are a curious confluence of athletic, racial, and gender stereotypes. The intermeshing of racial stereotypes with images of hegemonic masculinity, in effect, reflects and *reinforces* timeworn racist notions about the sexuality and masculinity of black men. It would therefore appear that sport media are complicit in ... the larger institutional and cultural processes that reproduce and exonerate white men's domination over black men.¹¹¹

In 1992, Whannel noted that in Britain, 'the world of sport as seen on TV is a world in which ... blacks are not quite full-status Britons';¹¹² in the decade since, this has arguably become less of a concern. As with the discussion of the representation of gender and national identity, what transpires is that 'issues around media representation are fundamentally about power and status in society'.¹¹³

Commentators have noted the existence of a perception that blacks are good at sport because it requires physical rather than intellectual qualities.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, when it comes to boxing in particular, the image of black boxers may be constructed in terms of 'brute animalism'.¹¹⁵ Davis and Harris present an interesting discussion of the classic stereotypes of African-American athletes, including their stereotyping as 'deviant' compared with the stereotypes of African-American athletes who appeal to European-Americans, in L.A. Wenner's book *MediaSport*.¹¹⁶ This is associated with black male sexuality being represented – at least in the US context – as dangerous.¹¹⁷

The Italia '90 Football World Cup provided the media with an opportunity to describe a successful African team. In subsequent years it became clear that the success of the Cameroon team was the

beginning of the emergence of African football, which climaxed with the Nigerian team winning the football gold medal in Atlanta 1996. In 1990, the relative success of the Cameroon team was completely unexpected by the media, as indeed was the victory of the Nigerian team six years on. 'In terms of their football, there was, initially, a noticeable tendency to describe the Cameroon players by reference to European or South American stars, present or past.'¹¹⁸ Thus, in accordance with this portrayal, the Cameroon player Omam Biyik was described as 'a black van Basten' and 'an African Pele'.¹¹⁹

However, this approach became one that highlighted the differences between African and European football and this was where the main stereotypes revealed themselves. The Cameroon footballers were described as 'joyful, uninhibited, enthusiastic'¹²⁰ and, like the Brazilians before them, they were also credited with bringing 'magic' to the game. Many newspapers regarded their play as 'temperamental', 'inventive', 'creative' and above all 'joyful'.¹²¹ In extreme cases, the Cameroon style of play was presented as 'irrational', 'as befits children below the age of reason'.¹²² Indeed, Cameroon were described as football's version of the 'savage infant'. Not surprisingly then, when Cameroon was eventually eliminated from the tournament, the coverage attributed this to the very same characteristics that made them attractive in the first place – 'their ingenuousness, their lack of professionalism and polish, even their lack of cynicism, in short, a style of football which had not yet grown up'.¹²³

Large-scale research conducted by Sabo, Curry Jansen, Tate, Duncan and Leggett for the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles analyzed seven televised international sports events occurring between 1988 and 1993:¹²⁴

- The 1988 Olympic Winter Games;
- 1990 Goodwill Games;
- 1991 Pan American Games;
- 1992 Olympic Winter Games;
- 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games;
- 1993 World University Games; and
- 1993 World Track and Field Championships.

These seven events were broadcast on different television networks. Sabo *et al.* analyzed sport competitions, personal profiles and opening

and closing ceremonies for their treatment of race, ethnicity and nationality and studied the racial/ethnic composition of broadcast images by commentators and interviewers. The results of this extensive study showed, on the one hand, that 'producers of televised international athletic events generally are attuned to issues of racial representation and cultural diversity' – a fact they attribute to some extent to growing awareness of related issues in the USA. However, while previously-documented patterns of media representation of black athletes were being addressed, they did find the treatment of 'Asian' athletes was 'biased'.

We should note that 'Asian' is a problematic term internationally. As Saeed *et al.* note:

the term 'Asian' in the United States is usually associated with those of Far Eastern origin, for example with Chinese or Japanese heritage and not readily with South-Asian provenance [the Indian sub-continent]: this suggests an immediate difficulty with the term 'black' if applied to American Asians, a difficulty produced by specific social and cultural circumstances.¹²⁵

In addition, the authors note that 'black' in some British usages incorporates 'Asian' Britons despite evidence of its limited use as a self-descriptor by British Pakistani Muslims and others.

In the American context, as has been noted, 'black' tends to have specific African-American reference. There were many interesting findings in the 1995 American research by Sabo *et al.*¹²⁶ In the vast majority of cases there were no overt narrative references to race although ethnicity was occasionally mentioned by commentators, especially when it was connected with some history of ethnic conflict. No evidence was found that commentators constructed negative representations of black athletes, rather black athletes were least likely to receive negative comments. Qualitative analyses of the personal interview segments showed that race, ethnicity, or nation did not appear to determine the types of stories or metaphors that producers and commentators used to portray athletes. Although commentators avoided making overt references to race in the case of black athletes, they seemed less constrained with Asian athletes and commentators often seemed to make a conscious effort to place Hispanic athletes in a favourable light. However, despite the high visibility of racial and ethnic minorities as athletes, whites held the greatest presence in the broadcasting booth.

It was observed in the opening section of this introduction that the 'race' focus of some American research has not been augmented elsewhere by enough research on the question of Muslim reception of sport culture, particularly in the European context. Saeed's examination of the Ali myth in this collection, as was noted above, addresses this under-investigated domain both autobiographically – in his consideration of Ali's role in his own Glasgow Muslim background – and also internationally (though Saeed also considers the question of boxing and 'race'). He poses a question that well conveys the complexities of racial and ethnic identities in the globalized world: 'How can a Pakistani family living in Scotland have such strong feelings for an African-American who specialized in a sport that had no real following within South-Asian communities until Ali's arrival?'

GLOBALIZATION, SPORT AND THE MEDIA

One of the central aspects assessed in the literature regarding globalization is the degree to which it is characterized by processes and tendencies that take place beyond the nation-state.¹²⁷ Some theorists acknowledge the evidence that although the state might seem redundant functionally, 'culturally and psychologically it remains of critical significance in structuring the political and social organization of humankind'.¹²⁸ We have already noted the centrality of national identity in the operation of sport as a symbolic system.

Given the multiple causal logics of globalization,¹²⁹ the media, though only one force among others at work, are central to any understanding of the process.¹³⁰ The spread of modern sport is considered to provide an interesting example of globalization.¹³¹ In fact, sport sociologists entered the globalization debate during the 1980s, in other words from the very beginning of the concept's fashionableness among the social sciences in general. The discussion of global sport, which originates mainly from North America,¹³² takes different forms and the various contributors explore many dimensions of the process.¹³³ As with the theorizing of globalization in general, this results in a range of literature, which is sometimes 'confusing, often contradictory, and always partial'.¹³⁴ Writers addressing the impact of global processes on sport may either emphasize globalization or processes such as Americanization, modernization and post-modernization, as well as cultural imperialism and cultural hegemony.¹³⁵ Wishing to clarify the

issue of global sport, Harvey *et al.* developed a model of globalization that incorporates political, economic, social and cultural dimensions.¹³⁶ Their 'web-model' provides a theoretical framework to enable analyses of the influence of globalization of sport on national sport policies, taking into account the tensions between the local and the global.¹³⁷ One such example is the tension surrounding international sporting events that have become outlets for nationalism and where national comparisons inevitably occur.¹³⁸ Blain and O'Donnell have provided extensive theorization of the manner in which the local-global debate in sport belongs within post-modernism theory.¹³⁹

For some writers sport falls more convincingly into the concepts of Americanization and cultural imperialism.¹⁴⁰ Much of the debate expressed in the literature on sport engages the issue of globalization versus Americanization. 'Arguments about the imperialist Americanization of sport have not been quite so straightforward as those for film and television because the product is not always so clearly American'.¹⁴¹ This is illustrated by basketball, popular around the globe (although not everywhere), but not played in its American version in most countries. However, basketball is an example of American marketing headed by the National Basketball Association (NBA)¹⁴² that led to worldwide interest in American basketball, the peak of which was the entry of the American Dream Team to the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games.

The hypothesis of 'Americanization' in the sport context is problematic when considering that truly international sports like football (soccer) and international events like the Olympics and the football World Cup are not American,¹⁴³ but another aspect of Americanization has emerged in the literature, relating to 'corporate sport'.¹⁴⁴ This entails the notion that sport has become less important in itself than in its capacity as a vehicle for attracting massive audiences and, even more than that, that sport has come to express ideas about 'competition, excellence, corporate efficiency, and what it is necessary to do to win – ideas that have their origins in the United States'.¹⁴⁵ In this sense the American style of sport has become the international example for corporate sport around the world; offering 'show-biz' elements, the ability to attract sponsors and, not least, displaying telegenic quality. Donnelly concludes that 'Americanization as cultural imperialism has at least some explanatory power'.¹⁴⁶ Rowe also advocates that for global sport, Americanization and cultural imperialism make persuasive partners,¹⁴⁷ as do others.¹⁴⁸

Globalization, Television and the Olympic Games

From their inception, Pierre de Coubertin intended the modern Olympic Games to take place on a global scale.¹⁴⁹ Over the years the Games were transformed into 'the most prominent regular global event of our times',¹⁵⁰ most of the transformation taking place in the last 20 years (during which time the soccer World Cup may have taken on greater salience for some television viewers). The current global status of the Olympics has been attributed to its media coverage, especially that of television and, more specifically, American television.¹⁵¹ The most important factor has been the massive sums of money that have become readily available to the Olympic movement from American networks battling over exclusive broadcasting rights.

The IOC is an example of a non-governmental international body that influences and affects the making and changing of sport policies in different countries¹⁵² and the Olympic Games have had a major role in the merger of professional and corporatized sport. This was underlined by rumours that the former IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, had threatened to withdraw baseball as an Olympic sport unless American major league players were permitted to participate in the 2000 Sydney Olympics.¹⁵³

We cannot address here a very large literature on the question of whether 'globalization' implies any degree of homogenization of cultural identities, though we might summarize very roughly by saying that while once the emphasis was on growing cultural similarity, now it is not. In the context of sport and in a comparative study of television coverage of the Opening Ceremony of the Barcelona Olympics by 28 broadcasters around the world, Moragas Spa *et al.* found varying local perspectives of the event. These local perspectives 'serve as an important reminder that local circumstances can greatly colour the experience of a global event like the Olympic games'.¹⁵⁴ The researchers proclaim their most interesting finding to be the fact that while the Opening Ceremony, and by extension the Olympics as a whole, certainly has a global character, it is the local dimensions that sustain the broadcasters' and audience's interest, that is, special attention to specific performers, largely to a nation's own performing athletes. This is in accordance with much audience research in media studies and with other evidence, such as the study of news.¹⁵⁵

The sense of complexity and ambiguity that surfaces from the existing literature on the topic of globalization may result from the fact

that this process is understood as being 'essentially dialectical',¹⁵⁶ in the sense that it embraces contradictory dynamics. Robertson has phrased this succinctly as 'the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular'.¹⁵⁷ In a media-saturated society, this process has become both rapid and self-aware, so that, for example, during the 1998 soccer World Cup, French newspaper journalists, invoking the character of other fans and their countries, offered their readers a variety of explanations as to why French fans were not ardent enough as spectators, including that France and the French were not underdeveloped enough (unlike the Paraguayans), not new enough (unlike the Croatians) and did not drink enough (unlike the Scots).¹⁵⁸

As noted, several of the contributions in this collection deal with aspects of globalization. Bernstein's interview with Alex Gilady, Boyle and Haynes' analysis of the technology and economics of media sport and Saeed's account of Ali are all bulletins from globalized society as, perhaps most of all, is Nancy Rivenburgh's account of the Olympics. It is hoped that the international dimensions of the research in this volume do some justice to the scale of the analytical challenge that the sport-media relationship poses in a world marked – in its more affluent and settled sectors, at least – by more and more connection across a variety of boundaries, accompanied by a growing sense of struggle between the local and the global.

NOTES

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The Emergence of a Major Research Field

27

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Sport, Media, Culture

28

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The Emergence of a Major Research Field

29

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