



Society, Culture, and Sport

After completing this chapter you should be able to:

- provide a brief history of the development of physical activity and sport in America;
- describe the history of the Olympic movement;
- discuss the accomplishments of some American sports heroes;
- explain how the commercialization of sport in modern society has evolved and how it impacts the consumer.



Society, culture, and sport are deeply interrelated. To understand this complex relationship, it is necessary to examine the historical underpinnings of sport in the modern world. Over the years, sport has evolved into a catalyst for transcending boundaries that divide our culture. It offers a playground of commonality for all to participate and enjoy. Professional, amateur, and youth sport activity provide an excellent opportunity for community gathering and socialization in a technological era that continues to encourage increased isolation.

In the United States, as elsewhere in the world, sport is part of the social and cultural matrix. Indeed, sport is no longer just sport – it is also big business. Enormous sums of money are spent and made in both amateur and professional sport. Sponsors are happy to lend their corporate logos and financial support to both athletes and competitions.

The thread of sport is now and will forever be intrinsically woven into the fabric of American society. In order to understand how this came to fruition we must reflect on historical journeys, individuals, and events that enabled the growth of sport to a point where it has become ingrained in our societal structure.

Our Fascination with Sport

“Most Americans are at least somewhat interested in sport, and many are downright fanatical about it. They attend games, read sport magazines, and talk endlessly about the subject. But even those fans who astound us with their knowledge of the most obscure facts about sport – who the opposing pitcher was when Don Larsen pitched his perfect no-hit World Series game or how many winning seasons the football team of Slippery Rock has had – do not necessarily understand sport.” (Eitzen, iii)

A Brief History of Sport in North America

Beginning with early games of native North Americans, the development of sport throughout

the Industrial Revolution, its emergence during the Progressive Era, the movement toward professionalism following World War I, and its influence in modern society, this section examines how each of the preceding eras supported, albeit not always smoothly, a transition to the next period. By analyzing American sport history and by examining the larger role sport currently plays in people’s everyday lives, we can further understand how sport has come to permeate our culture and society. Sport is so prevalent in our society that we have become increasingly unaware of its influence.

New Beginnings and the Industrial Revolution (1400s to 1870)

European explorers of the 15th and 16th centuries set sail in search of new trade routes to Asia. What they discovered was a New World and a new race of people. Native North Americans were living in well-established tribal communities across the continent. The similarities to the “civilized” cultures of the world were numerous. Discovered was a race of people who had customs, culture, law, agriculture, entertainment, and even sport.

Games were important to early native cultures. For the most part, they were focused around ceremonial and religious practices, the transmission of cultural values to the young, or the teaching of survival skills. The early explorers and settlers were fascinated by several of the games played by the native people. One such game, known as **baggataway**, was played to develop a warrior’s skill in preparation for battle with other tribes. The game used sticks with mesh loops on the end, a hard ball, and two goals made of sticks set at the opposite ends of a playing field. It has been asserted that the first Europeans to view tribes playing this game were the French. They began to play a similar game called “la crosse,” named as such because the sticks reminded French settlers and explorers of a bishop’s crosier. Lacrosse is thought to be the earliest game developed on the North American continent (Figure 19.1).



Development of sport in the New World would be slow going, however, as prevailing church sentiment toward leisure activity and numerous wars over control of land rights in the New World hampered any real development of sport during the late 17th and 18th centuries. The end of the American Revolution (1776-1783) saw the emergence of a new revolution, the First Industrial Revolution. It began with the development of steam- and coal-powered machinery that enabled work to be completed in a much more time-efficient manner. This, coupled with advances in farming tools, machinery, and techniques, resulted in a slow but steady increase in amounts of available leisure time in people's lives. To fill this leisure time, sport, games, and play began to develop more rapidly in western Europe and North America. The reduced work week, half-holidays on Saturday, and recognition of the Sabbath paved the way for the conditions needed for the development of sport in a modern society.

In the beginning, it was primarily the social elite who had the most available leisure time; therefore, games in these circles were some of the first to take root. Wealthy British military officers who had come from private schools brought with them their own sporting traditions, in activities as

diverse as cricket, fox hunting, and snowshoeing. Rural farmers and settlers, by contrast, did not have the resources or time to enjoy a comparable level of sporting activity. Target shooting, horse racing, sport hunting, and running were some of the typical activities enjoyed by Americans during the early 1800s.

One individual sport, brought by early Dutch settlers to the New Amsterdam (now New York City) and New Jersey area, involved hitting a ball around an open field with a club. *Kolf* was the Dutch name for the club used to hit the ball. In the late 1700s, a game more similar to the modern version of golf (which originated in Scotland in the 15th century) was played in Georgia and South Carolina. This sport was more suited to the socioeconomically advantaged, who had enough land and leisure time to spare to participate in such a pretentious game.

The Second Industrial Revolution and the Progressive Era (1870 to 1918)

The main focus of early North American sports was predominantly social in nature. There were no leagues or competitions, and there were few



Figure 19.1 Baggataway, now known as lacrosse, enjoyed great popularity in early North America.



common rules for the events that did take place. This changed dramatically, however, during the remainder of the 19th century. By this time, leagues, regularly scheduled competitions, and standardized rules had developed. The last decade of the century, and continuing until the First World War, was marked by increased promotion of both participatory and spectator sports.

Most activities enjoyed during the First Industrial Revolution were individual games, sports, or contests of skill and endurance. However, several team sports did begin to take root and emerge further during the Second Industrial Revolution. Lacrosse continued its development, especially in western New York and Canada. One sport in particular, the sport of “bat and ball” or “town ball,” would also find roots in many small rural communities throughout New York and New England. The development of basketball, football, and ice hockey all occurred in the late 1800s.

Ice Hockey

Considered a distinctly Canadian game, ice hockey is thought to have originated at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. The game was played on a frozen pond with a wooden puck and a stick, and early game development drew similar comparisons to the Irish game of “hurley” (Figure 19.2). The first recorded hockey games were played in the mid 1850s by British soldiers stationed in Kingston, Ontario, and Halifax, Nova Scotia. The modern development of hockey followed a distinct and traceable path down the St. Lawrence River to Montreal, Quebec, and then into the New England states. In 1877, the first published set of ice hockey rules was drawn up by students at Montreal's McGill University; many historians claim these rules were based on “the Halifax Rules” brought to Montreal from Nova Scotia.

Baseball

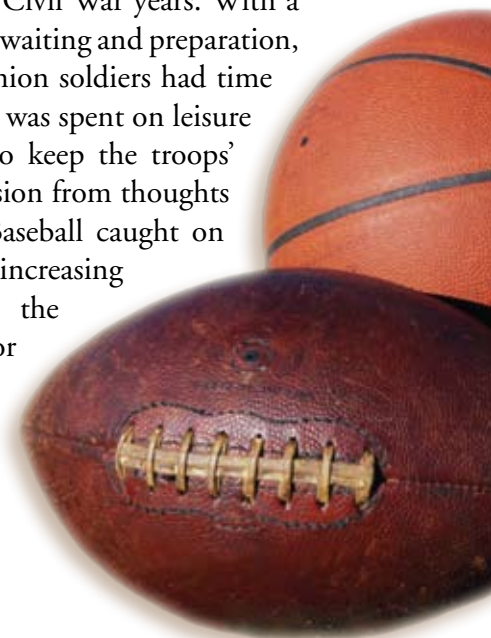
Disputes exist to this day over the exact date and place of origin for the game “bat and ball,” “town ball,” or as we have come to know it, baseball. Long-established tradition holds that Abner



Figure 19.2 Early hockey players did not wear helmets and wore very little protective equipment.

Doubleday first invented and played the game in 1839 in Cooperstown, New York, yet recent discoveries in historical journals and newspapers allude to a similar game played in Ontario, western Massachusetts, and small towns in eastern New York and New England in the late 18th century. Early influences on the sport date back to 18th-century England and the game of “rounders.” All debates aside, the era of modern baseball began when Alexander Cartwright formed the Knickerbockers Base Ball Club in 1845 and wrote down formal rules of competition. The first “official” game played under these rules took place on June 19, 1846, at Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey. Cartwright's Knickerbockers Club was defeated by the New York Nine 23–1.

The game of baseball spread throughout the United States during the Civil War years. With a great deal of time spent in waiting and preparation, both Confederate and Union soldiers had time on their hands. This time was spent on leisure pursuits in an attempt to keep the troops' morale high and ease tension from thoughts of impending conflict. Baseball caught on and was played with increasing frequency throughout the country. Blacks (slave or free), social elites, the middle class, farmers, and urbanites alike spent their free time socializing





and learning the game that would eventually become known as America's national pastime.

Football

Another team sport that evolved in the post-Civil War era was American football. The origins of the sport – also known in its infancy as the “Boston game” – can be traced to a combination of rugby and soccer rules, with the first game in America officially being played between Rutgers and Princeton on November 6, 1869. Originally the game was played with soccer rules imported from England. The introduction of a rugby style came after a scrimmage in May 1874 between McGill University (Montreal) and Harvard University. The Canadian rugby style so intrigued the men from Harvard that colleges in the United States soon followed suit. When the U.S. Intercollegiate Football Association formed in 1876, rugby rules were adopted. Development from the original 15-man game, which had very little control and even less strategy, to a game with 11 men who were in control and used strategy to move the football came several years later with the vision of a young footballer from Yale University, Walter Camp. His innovations and rule suggestions would earn him the prestigious recognition as the “father of modern football.” Camp proudly mentored and was involved with the sport and its development until his death in 1925.

Basketball

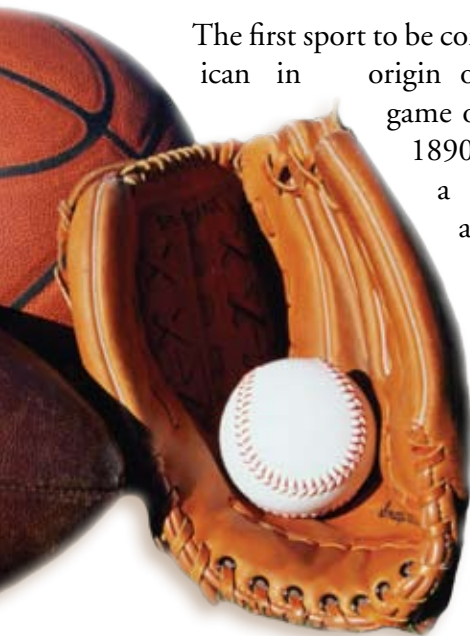
The first sport to be considered truly North American in origin other than lacrosse is the game of basketball. Developed in 1890 by Dr. James Naismith, a visiting Canadian scholar attending the prestigious YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, basketball has no controversy over its place of origin. The first game used a round soccer ball and two peach

baskets placed at opposite ends of the gymnasium. A small hole was cut in the bottom of the baskets, and each time someone scored, a broom was used to push the ball up and out. Eventually the bottoms were cut out to allow the ball to pass through on its own. The game developed as a form of recreation to pass away the time during the cold New England winters, which sometimes made outdoor activities unbearable. It would eventually spread throughout the states, especially in urban areas, where YMCA centers were developing. Graduates from the YMCA Training School, now known as Springfield College, would learn the game and take the rules with them as they ventured out across the country to bring physical activity and sport to communities as a way to keep young men out of trouble.

Other Activities

The end of the 19th century marked several unique developments in physical activity and sport in North America and worldwide. First, a bicycle craze began in large response to overpopulation problems and transportation issues related to living in larger, overcrowded cities. Following advances in the mechanical stability of bicycles to improve safety, their marked increase in use also brought about a competitive sporting spirit, and bicycle races sprung up in cities and countrysides across North America. Another unique development, the internal combustion engine, saw the invention of the automobile. As with the bicycle, racing these new machines became a popular pastime. However, it would primarily be the economically advantaged who had the financial resources to afford the high price tag of a new vehicle.

Finally, one of the most significant developments in sport history was the return of the Olympic Games. Pierre de Coubertin revived the Games and modeled them after the ancient Olympics held in Olympia, Greece, nearly 1,000 years earlier. The modern Olympic Games, along with technological travel advances, helped propel a sense of nationalism and competition among countries into the new century.





The Post–World War I Era (1919 to Present)

Overshadowed by the conflict of World War I and the time of the Great Depression was an era known as the “golden age” of sport. Professional sport in North America was beginning to take root, with stars such as Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig (baseball), Red Grange (football), Joe Malone (hockey), and Jack Dempsey (boxing) leading the way. Baseball’s Negro Leagues were formed in what was still a segregated America. In Canton, Ohio (current site of the NFL Hall of Fame), the American Professional Football Association was formed in 1920. This was the predecessor of the league now known as the National Football League. The National Hockey League, founded in 1917, added its first American franchise, the Boston Bruins, in 1924.

During this period, sport began to be seen as a form of entertainment that could generate revenue for owners. Large venues were built to showcase competitions, athletes were paid to perform, and – like the legendary Babe Ruth – players were traded or sold for profit. Baseball was growing, especially in urban areas that could draw large crowds, and owners took advantage of this. Football teams that had originally developed in smaller rural areas were moved to larger urban centers to generate more profit for the owners and larger paychecks for the players.

It was also during these times that the Olympics gained momentum, and even in the midst of the Great Depression, the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and Winter Olympics in Lake Placid brought forth an unparalleled sense of nationalism and hope in the United States during a time when little existed. The diversion that sport created helped ease the tension of the times. It would take the post–World War II economic boom to bring the United States out of the Great Depression, and with it sport, recreation, and physical activity emerged as an important part of our society. The period following World War II and continuing throughout the 1950s was accompanied by economic prosperity, rapid technological change,

and tremendous population growth, largely due to immigration.

Emergence of Mass Media

The invention of the radio initially brought life to sport. Hearing your favorite team play on the radio was a way to associate with sport and keep track of your favorite players. The invention of television brought these icons of North American sport into people’s homes little by little over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s. Fast paced, exciting, and unscripted, athletic events were the perfect medium for television. Families would gather around and cheer their favorite heroes and teams on to victory. *Hockey Night in Canada*, the longest-running weekly sports program in the world, began radio broadcasts in 1931 and television broadcasts in 1952.

As sport popularity grew over the latter half of the 20th century, so did participation. In the 1950s and 1960s, the game of baseball was the most televised and popular sport in the United States in terms of participation and viewership. Joe DiMaggio, Willie Mays, Ted Williams, and Jackie Robinson were all heroes of a generation. Tennis became a national craze after Billie Jean King’s humiliation of Bobby Riggs in “the Battle of the Sexes.” Children and adults have increasingly become influenced by television and popular athletes of the times, looking to emulate what they see on television.





Sport for All

Two landmark decisions in U.S. legal history in the second half of the 20th century ensured the rapid development of sport throughout the United States. In the first – **Brown v. Board of Education** (1954) – the Supreme Court concluded that the doctrine of “separate but equal,” set forth in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), had no place in the field of public education. This decision set in motion the wheels of social change, allowing for integration and equal access for all races. With segregated schooling now unconstitutional, the arena of sport began to open up to the best athletes, regardless of color.

Amendment XIV

Section 1. *All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

The second landmark legislation was the establishment of **Title IX** of the Education Amendments of 1972. Where *Brown v. Board of*

Title IX

Prohibition against discrimination; exceptions. *No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.*

On October 29, 2002, the Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act was renamed the **Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act** to commemorate Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink – the woman who authored the landmark law – following her death in 2002.

Education secured rights for those of varying skin color, Title IX ensured that equal opportunity and funding would be made available for all persons, regardless of sex. This legislation brought with it a landslide of funding and support for American women participating in sport and physical activity.



A Brief History of the Olympic Games

The Athens Olympics in 2004 showed how much the Olympics have changed since the first modern Games in Athens in 1896. Following is a summary of each of the modern Olympic Games, including some notable stories and achievements.

Summer Olympics

(I) Athens, 1896

The first modern Olympic Games were held close to the original site of the ancient Olympics. A vision of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founding member of the International Olympic Committee



The Modern Olympics



Baron Pierre de Coubertin was the founder of the modern Olympics. He wanted athleticism and fitness to be an everyday part of life, so he devoted his time to bringing back the long-dead Olympic Games. When the Greek

government frowned at the potential expense, de Coubertin persuaded the ruler of Greece to lead a fund-raising campaign to bring the Games to Athens in 1896. Although the 1900 Paris Games were a near disaster, he persisted in his efforts, and the movement developed. In 1936, de Coubertin was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize but was not selected. He died of a stroke at the age of 74 on September 2, 1937. He requested in his will that his heart be removed from his body and buried at Olympia in Greece. This wish was carried out.

(IOC), the modern Olympic Games were meant to promote the idea of true amateur athletic competition.

American James Connolly took first place in the triple jump to become the first Olympic champion in more than 1,500 years. According to a competitor in the long-distance swimming events, the athletes were transported by boat and left to swim back to shore on their own.

(II) Paris, 1900

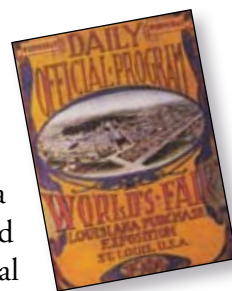
The first appearance of women at the modern Olympic Games was in Paris. Women were not allowed to participate in what were considered “athletic” (track and field) events, although they competed in golf and tennis. These Olympics were held in conjunction with the 1900 World’s Fair, also held in Paris.

The first female Olympic champion was Great Britain’s Charlotte Cooper, who won the singles and mixed doubles tennis. American Myer Prinstein lost out on a gold medal because he chose not to participate for religious reasons in the long jump finals, which were held on a Sunday.

(III) St. Louis, 1904

The St. Louis Games, held during the 1904 World’s Fair, were spread out over approximately four and a half months. These Games would become the first to utilize the medal system.

The majority of the athletes were Americans, who dominated the Games. Most noteworthy was George Eyser, who won six medals in gymnastics despite participating with a wooden leg.



(IV) London, 1908

Originally awarded to Rome, the London Olympic Games were unique in that the athletes walked in by nation for the first time.

Ray Ewry of the United States became the first person to win eight Olympic gold medals in individual events, dominating the standing jump events in 1900, 1904, and 1908. In the spirit of sportsmanship, the final in middleweight Greco-Roman wrestling between Frithiof Martensson and Mauritz Andersson, both of Sweden, was postponed a day so Martensson could recover from a minor injury. Martensson won the match.

(V) Stockholm, 1912

Electronic devices, public address systems, and photo finishes were used on a limited basis for the first time at the Games of 1912. Stockholm also holds the distinction of being the first of the modern Games to have representation from all five continents.

Jim Thorpe, a Native American from Oklahoma, won gold in both the pentathlon and decathlon. He was later stripped of these medals because of questions of his amateur status. The IOC reinstated the medals 69 years later, 29 years after Thorpe’s death.

(VI) Berlin, 1916

World War I forced the cancellation of the Berlin Games. It still holds the distinction of being the Games of the VI Olympiad even though no