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978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

Introduction

I. I. SETTING THE SCENE

Democratic societies rest on foundations that extend far beyond governmental institutions. In *Democracy in America* Alexis de Tocqueville observes that “The most democratic country on earth is found to be, above all, the one where men in our day have most perfected the art of pursuing the object of their common desires in common and have applied this new science to the most objects. Does this result from an accident or could it be that there in fact exists a necessary relation between associations and equality?” Tocqueville supplies a strongly affirmative response to his own question and argues that the cooperative, face-to-face interactions that take place in voluntary associations have important effects on the individuals involved: “sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another.” He concludes that voluntary associations are an indispensable component of egalitarian, democratic societies:

Among the laws that rule human societies there is one that seems more precise and clearer than all the others. In order that men remain civilized or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among them in the same ratio as equality of conditions increases.¹

The associations that Tocqueville has in mind are not solely or even primarily those that are overtly political in nature, but those formed for a variety of other purposes, ranging from distributing books to founding hospitals. Although Tocqueville has nothing to say about sport, Robert Putnam, whose widely-read work on social capital builds directly on Tocqueville’s

¹ de Tocqueville 2000 (1835–40), 490, 491, 492, respectively. For current thinking about voluntary associations and democracy, see Warren 2001. For the intellectual background to Tocqueville’s work, see Lebow and Lebow, forthcoming.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

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Excerpt

[More information](#)2 *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*

ideas, makes the case that the voluntary associations that contribute in a significant and positive fashion to democratization include soccer clubs and bowling teams.²

Seen from the perspective outlined in Tocqueville's and Putnam's work, the relationship between democratization in society and in sport might seem too obvious to warrant extended discussion. Sports teams, as Putnam points out, are a form of voluntary association, and if voluntary associations are a vital part of democratic societies, it would seem to follow that sport should be seen as a meaningful underpinning of democratization. There are, however, complicating factors that need to be taken into account in considering the relationship between sport and democratization. To begin with, sport is not necessarily an archetypal voluntary association. Sport can be a context in which participants regularly experience face-to-face interactions, a defining component of voluntary associations. On the other hand, some forms of sport, such as running every morning entirely alone, are devoid of such interactions. In addition, sport is seen by many people as little more than a pastime, a harmless diversion that has no noteworthy effects. From this perspective, a discussion of the relationship between sport and democratization is roughly akin to a discussion of the relationship between the hobby of collecting antique bottle caps and democratization. Finally, even if one accepts that sport, especially in times and places where it is played and watched with great seriousness and regularity by large numbers of people, might have an impact on society as a whole, the notional democratizing capacity of sport is not always immediately apparent. Sport was, for example, immensely popular in both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era, neither of which is likely to be held up as a model democratic society.³ For all of these reasons one cannot blithely conclude that sport promotes democratization.

There is, nonetheless, good reason to think that there may well be a connection of some sort between democratization in society and democratization in sport. Consider the following statistics. The 91st Congress of the United States, which was in office from 1969–71, had 524 male representatives and 11 female representatives.⁴ In 1970, there were in the United States 308,627 male physicians and 25,401 female physicians. When the National Federation of State High School Associations conducted its annual survey of the number of athletes on varsity sports teams in the United States in 1971–72 it found 3,666,917 male athletes and 294,015 female athletes. In the early 1970s females thus represented roughly 2% of all members of

² Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 91–99; Putnam 2000, 109–14.

³ This observation echoes much recent research that has emphasized that not all voluntary associations exert a positive, democratizing influence on society. See Warren 2001, 3–16.

⁴ All dates are CE unless otherwise specified, with the exception of Chapters 8–10, in which the reverse is true.

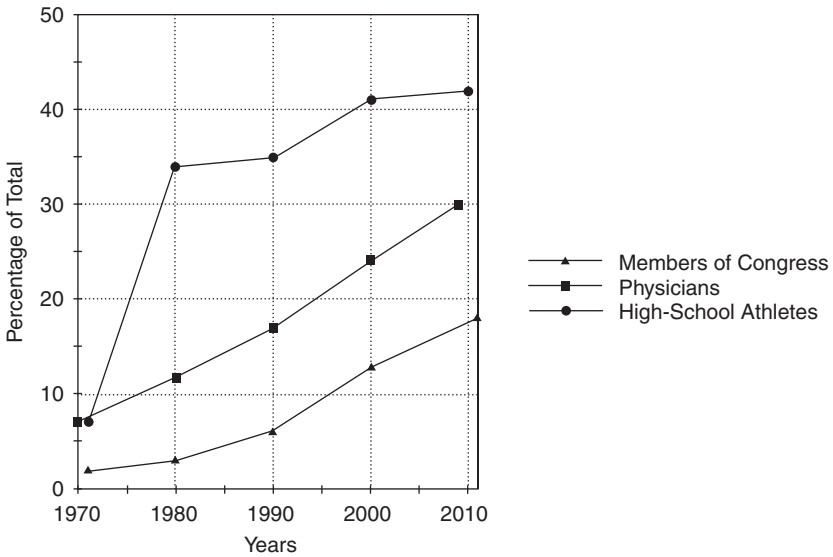


FIGURE 1. Percentage of Females among Total Number of Individuals in Various Fields and Activities in the United States, 1970 to Present, by Decade

Congress, 7% of all physicians, and 7% of all varsity high school athletes. The 112th Congress of the United States, which will be in office from 2011–13, has 94 female representatives. In 2009, there were in the United States 684,219 male physicians and 287,683 female physicians. When the National Federation of State High School Associations conducted its annual survey of the number of athletes on varsity sports teams in the United States in 2009–10 it found 4,455,740 male athletes and 3,172,637 female athletes. Females thus currently represent roughly 18% of all members of Congress, 30% of all physicians, and 42% of all varsity high school athletes.⁵ This data is presented graphically (with figures for intermediate decades included) in Figure 1. The progress of American women in achieving more equal rights and opportunities in society as a whole has thus been closely paralleled in their growing participation in sport.

This is but one example of a much larger phenomenon, which can be understood in four different ways:

⁵ Information about the number of female members of the United States Congress is taken from <http://womenincongress.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html>; about the number of female physicians from <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/women-physicians-congress/statistics-history.page?> and from the American Medical Association's publication *Physician Characteristics and Distribution in the U.S., 2011*; about the number of female high school athletes from <http://www.nfhs.org/content.aspx?id=3282>.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)4 *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*

- (1) democratization in society is cause, democratization in sport effect, or, to put it differently, the nature of sport reflects and is determined by the nature of the society in which it is played, whereas the nature of sport has little or no effect on the nature of society;
- (2) democratization in sport contributes meaningfully to the democratization of society;
- (3) democratization in both society and sport is more apparent than real, and society and sport function primarily as mutually reinforcing systems of domination and oppression; sport, to the extent that it acts on society in this regard, typically inhibits democratization;
- (4) democratization in society and in sport are both determined by one or more exogenous factors such as capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, Protestantism, or modernization.

All of these views of the relationship between sport and democratization, which are by no means entirely mutually exclusive, have been much discussed among both scholars and the general public for well over a century. The attention that has been paid to this subject is not surprising given the practical and ideological importance of democracy in the Western world and widespread devotion to sport, both in the present day and in the past, stretching back to ancient Greece. The nature of the relationship between sport and democratization is of interest to a wide array of scholars, ranging from sport historians and sport sociologists to political scientists and social historians.

Moreover, the relationship between sport and democratization is a matter of considerable significance well beyond the academic community. If sport does indeed have the capacity to affect and effect democratization in society as a whole, the expenditure of resources on sport can be understood and explained as a worthwhile investment in sustaining and extending democracy. If sport has no capacity to promote democratization, then one of the basic justifications for spending time, energy, and money on sport vanishes. If sport actually inhibits democratization, it becomes, from one perspective, a pernicious activity that needs to be reconstructed or curbed.

The nature of the relationship between sport and democratization thus has significant public policy ramifications because in much of the world, most notably in liberal democracies in Europe, North America, and Australasia, the expenditure of vast amounts of time, energy, and public and private funds on sport is legitimized in part by appeals to the capacity of sport to foster democratization. Daniel Tarschys, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, proclaimed in 1995 that:

The hidden face of sport is...the tens of thousands of enthusiasts who find in their football, rowing, athletics, or rock-climbing clubs a place for meeting and exchange, but above all the training ground for community life. In this microcosm, people learn to take responsibility, to follow rules, to accept one another, to look for consensus, to take on voluntary tasks – in a word, to take an active part in building the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

environment they like, thus living their very own democracy. Seen from this angle, sport is, *par excellence*, the ideal school for democracy.⁶

The current official position of the Council of Europe is that “sport is a fundamental pillar of society” and that sport, if played properly, promotes “democracy and participation.”⁷ This position helps justify, and is reflected in, consistently high levels of public funding for sport by European governments; for instance, national and local governments in France spend the equivalent of more than \$15 billion per year on sport, in Germany more than \$8 billion.⁸

Belief in the democratizing powers of sport is also widespread in the United States, where public spending on sport comes primarily through the financing of athletics in public school systems. Some sense of scale can be had from the fact that the 218 public universities in America that field sports teams competing at the highest level (Division 1) spent \$6.2 billion on athletics in 2010. Of that total, roughly \$4 billion came from revenue sources such as television rights and ticket sales, and \$2 billion came from subsidies in the form of fees paid by students and transfers from schools’ general budgets.⁹ If one keeps in mind that there are approximately 4,000 institutions of higher learning in the United States and 7.5 million high school athletes, the scale of public spending on sport begins to become clear.

That spending is justified in a variety of different ways, among the most important of which is the claim that sport participation (and to a lesser extent spectatorship) has strongly positive effects that are valuable to American society. For example, a recent study by the United States Anti-Doping Agency characterizes sport as “a national asset” on the grounds that:

We know that sport, at its best, can build character and promote the virtues of honesty, respect, selfless teamwork, dedication, and commitment to a greater cause. Sport lessons (good and bad) transcend the playing field, spilling over into the classroom, the business world, and the community, and contribute to shaping the character and culture of America’s citizens.

The study included a survey of 8,934 individuals that collectively constituted a representative sample of the population of the United States, and found that:

⁶ Tarschys 1995, 5. The characterization of sport as a “school in democracy” is found in Betts 1974, 330, but it was in regular use long before Betts’ time. It appears, for example, in an article on physical education in Germany written by Carl Diem in 1948 (Diem 1948, 431), and it in all probability was in circulation well before then. The roots of this usage likely can be found in Pericles’ Funeral Oration, a paean to Athenian democracy, in which he declared that Athens was the “school of Greece” (Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 2.41.1).

⁷ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/epas/about/history_En.asp. On recent developments in government sport policies, see Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Nødland, and Rommetvedt 2007 and Nicholson, Hoye, and Houlihan 2011.

⁸ For government expenditures on sport, see Humphreys, Maresova, and Ruseski 2010.

⁹ Berkowitz and Upton 2011.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*

The majority of adults agree that sport provides a source of fun and enjoyment (80%), can reduce youth crime and delinquency (84%), can teach valuable life lessons (80%), and can bring people together in ways that strengthen communities (76%).¹⁰

The survey did not ask about the relationship between sport and democratization per se, but the results leave little doubt that most Americans subscribe to the belief that sport plays a key role in maintaining a healthy democratic society in the United States.¹¹

I.2. LOOKING FORWARD

Despite its importance, the relationship between sport and democratization has rarely been discussed in a systematic or entirely satisfactory fashion. All of the four views outlined earlier about the nature of that relationship have been intermittently defended or attacked, either explicitly or implicitly, but a methodical treatment of the subject does not appear to exist.

In addition, much of the earlier work on this subject has been vitiated by a number of terminological and methodological shortcomings, four of which merit specific mention. First, the words “democracy” and “democratization” can take on an enormous range of meanings, and discussion of the relationship between sport and democratization has sometimes been clouded by confusion resulting from the use of similar terms to designate disparate phenomena. Second, sport has frequently been treated as a monolithic phenomenon that has uniformly positive or negative effects, an approach that fails to consider the possibility that different kinds of sport might have different impacts on democratization or that even particular kinds of sport might have the capacity to both foster and inhibit democratization. Third, a considerable fraction of the work, scholarly and otherwise, supporting the idea that sport fosters democratization has suffered from a “black-box” problem, which is to say that it postulates a causal relationship without specifying mechanisms responsible for the presumed result. This has been a factor of some importance in the frequently skeptical reception that work has received. Fourth, most previous treatments of sport and democratization have worked within limited temporal horizons determined by a presentist bias, and that has impeded consideration of a range of material that can clarify many of the relevant issues.

My goals in this book are to formulate terminology and methodology more refined than that used in the past and to draw on a more temporally diverse collection of evidence in the service of exploring

¹⁰ United States 2011, 3, 7, respectively.

¹¹ The view that sport is an essential training ground for democratic citizenship in America is nicely articulated in Gillespie 2010. For an earlier articulation of the same position, see Tunis 1941.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

each of the four possible views of the relationship between sport and democratization. I will argue that certain kinds of sport do indeed foster societal democratization.

Chapter 2 lays the groundwork for what follows by considering four key terms: democratization, mass sport, vertical sport, and horizontal sport. Democratization is here defined as either a condition in which the balance between egalitarian and hierarchical relationships in a given situation is tilted strongly toward the former, or the process that brings such a balance into being, maintains it, or extends it further toward egalitarianism. Democratization can characterize a society as a whole as well as the specific sphere of sport. Although the participation of a small percentage of a society's populace in sport might conceivably contribute significantly to democratization on a societal level, participation on a mass scale is inherently more likely to do so and its effects are much easier to trace. It is, therefore, prudent to focus on mass sport, which can be defined as a situation in which large numbers of people from a broad socioeconomic spectrum are regularly involved in sport as participants and spectators. Another essential distinction is between what are here called horizontal and vertical sport. Horizontal sport is organized and conducted in an egalitarian fashion, vertical sport in a hierarchical fashion. The former tends to foster democratization, whereas the latter tends to inhibit it. The discussion in the remainder of the book thus concentrates on horizontal mass sport.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a review of previous work that has posited a causal connection between sport and democratization. This review, which starts with the American Progressives at the beginning of the twentieth century and finishes with the work of Robert Putnam at the end of that century, focuses on familiarizing the reader with methodologies that have been used in the study of sport and democratization. Functionalism, which stresses the interconnection between activities in various spheres of any given society, is given particular attention because it implicitly or explicitly lies at the heart of virtually all scholarly work on the relationship between democratization in sport and society.

Chapter 4 explores one possible view of the relationship between sport and democratization, namely that democratization in society is cause, and democratization in sport effect. This view rests on the ideas that the nature of sport reflects and is determined by the nature of the society in which it is played and that the nature of sport has little or no effect on the nature of society. We will see that sport does indeed reflect society, but that sport also affects society, by shaping the behavior of participants and spectators both on the playing field and off it.

Chapter 5 probes the possibility that democratization in sport contributes meaningfully to the democratization of society. It identifies and, on the basis of evidence from modern-day democratized societies in Europe, North America, and Australasia, substantiates the operation of four

8 *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*

separate mechanisms by means of which horizontal mass sport fosters democratization in society:

- the facilitation of the formation of small-scale, tightly bonded horizontal groups that literally enact democratization;
- the cultivation of particularized and generalized trust;
- the cultivation of a sense of political efficacy;
- the cultivation of self-disciplined individuals with a predisposition to obey rules and legally constituted authorities.

It is argued that these mechanisms are operative in all societies with horizontal mass sport.

Chapter 6 examines the possibility that sport inhibits societal democratization. It shows that horizontal mass sport can engender docility, exclusion, hostility, and status differentials and, as a result, has the capacity to act as an impediment to democratization. Here again, the effects of horizontal mass sport appear to be independent of historical context.

Chapter 7 takes up the problem of assessing the cumulative impact of the various components of the relationship between democratization in sport and society. The preceding discussion shows that sport both reflects and shapes society and that horizontal mass sport can both foster and inhibit democratization. This means that democratization in sport is to some extent a reflection of democratization in society, but that horizontal mass sport also has the capacity to exert an influence on democratization in society as a whole, both positively and negatively.

The capacity of horizontal mass sport to both foster and inhibit democratization alters the nature of the inquiry because it means that considering the relationship between democratization in sport and society becomes in large part a matter of determining overall effect. In other words, the question becomes whether horizontal mass sport, *on balance*, helps or hinders democratization at the societal level.

The sheer complexity of the interactions involved and the lack of suitable quantitative data make it impossible to establish the relative weight of each relevant factor and on that basis reach a conclusion about the overall effect of horizontal mass sport on societal democratization. There are, however, a variety of different ways of evaluating the relative efficacy of the various mechanisms by means of which horizontal mass sport promotes and inhibits societal democratization. Horizontal mass sport has the capacity to facilitate the formation of a plethora of tightly bonded, egalitarian groups, which exert a powerful democratizing effect on society that is not easily counteracted. In addition, four of the mechanisms by means of which sport fosters and inhibits societal democratization form two antithetical pairs, and the relative strength of the mechanisms within these pairs can be established with some confidence. In both instances, the positive effects of sport on democratization appear to outweigh its negative effects. Further clarity can

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

be achieved by studying outcomes, which means looking at democratization in societies with horizontal mass sport.

Data from the present day shows a strong correlation between rates of participation in horizontal sport and levels of societal democratization, which suggests that horizontal mass sport fosters societal democratization. This data is not, however, conclusive because it cannot show how that correlation came into being. More persuasive evidence can be found in data from countries that in recent decades have instituted government-sponsored programs to increase sport participation. In those countries, increasing levels of participation in horizontal sport show a strong positive correlation with increasing levels of societal democratization. However, here again there are interpretive difficulties. If, as hypothesized, democratization in society and sport are mutually determinative, the influence of society on sport is particularly strong in instances in which increases in sport participation are the product of official sport-for-all programs. In such instances, the correlation between democratization in sport and society may well be largely the product of the influence of society on sport.

The most illuminating cases, therefore, are those in which significant changes in participation in horizontal sport have occurred without government intervention. Due to the relative rarity of mass sport until recently, there are only two obvious examples of that occurring: Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE and Britain in the nineteenth century CE. In both of those times and places systems of horizontal mass sport emerged spontaneously, and they thus represent essential test cases for the relationship between democratization in sport and society. The United States in the first half of the twentieth century represents a similar but not identical case. In that instance horizontal mass sport emerged in the absence of an official sport-for-all program, but due in part to a mix of private and public initiatives intended to increase sport participation.

Chapters 8–16 thus contain detailed historical case studies of democratization in sport and society in Greece and Britain. Two other historical examples of mass sport are examined in a more cursory fashion in Chapters 10 and 14: Germany, where mass sport before World War II was primarily vertical, and the United States. Taken together these chapters provide an outline of the early history of mass sport. The absence of detailed statistical information for all of these times and places makes it difficult to establish the level of societal democratization directly, and so democratization is tracked primarily through changes in political institutions and practices. Such changes do not represent the only or even the most important form of democratization, but they are, given the available evidence, the most easily documented form of democratization and offer a useful if imperfect proxy for democratization broadly construed. As will become obvious, whereas Chapters 2–7 have a strong tincture of the sociology of sport, Chapters 8–16 are more typical exercises in sport history in particular and social history in general.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01269-1 - Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Paul Christesen

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*

The result of these case studies is clear: in Greece, Britain, and the United States the emergence of horizontal mass sport, and the resulting democratization of sport, were closely associated with powerful democratizing trends in society as a whole. In Greece and Britain horizontal mass sport fostered societal democratization, by means of the four mechanisms identified earlier, and by three further, contextually specific means: by serving as an arena for meritocratic status competition that undermined systems of ascribed rank, by serving as a model of and for emergent horizontal relationships, and by promoting group closure. The cumulative effect of these mechanisms appears to have outweighed the inhibiting effect of the docility, exclusion, hostility, and status differentials generated by horizontal mass sport. In Germany, vertical mass sport was associated with a strongly authoritarian sociopolitical system.

In Chapter 17 the preceding discussion is summarized, and the four possible views of the relationship between democratization in sport and society are assessed. One of those views, that democratization in both society as a whole and in sport is determined by one or more exogenous factors such as industrialization, urbanization, capitalism, Protestantism, or modernization, is addressed. This view can be evaluated relatively simply because none of the exogenous factors that have been suggested as determinative of democratization in society and sport were operative in ancient Greece. The fact that the correlation between democratization in sport and society held good in that context strongly suggests that democratization in society and sport are not determined by an exogenous factor.

The other three views of the relationship between democratization in sport and society are all at least partially valid and all need to be taken into consideration to formulate a nuanced understanding of that relationship. I will argue that:

- democratization in sport reflects, but is not entirely determined by, democratization in society;
- horizontal mass sport can, in and of itself, be an important form of democratization;
- horizontal mass sport can both foster and inhibit democratization on a societal level, but its cumulative effect is significantly weighted to the former; horizontal mass sport thus reinforces democratization in society as a whole.

It is important to bear in mind that it is impossible to achieve complete certainty about the relationship between democratization in sport and society. There can be no doubt that democratization in sport reflects democratization in society and that the level of democratization in society is influenced by a variety of factors. It remains possible that democratization in sport either has no significant effect on democratization in society or actually inhibits societal democratization and that the consistent correlation between