

## THE END OF THE AMATEUR HEGEMONY IN BRITISH SPORT, C.1960-2000

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s Britain succumbed to anxious introspection as the media began to focus on the idea that it was a country in decline. Readers were subjected to a barrage of 'state of the nation' journalism and a series of paperback 'specials' asked 'What's Wrong with Britain?' *The Stagnant Society* (1961), written by, Michael Shanks, a *Financial Times* journalist, was characteristic of this *genre*. Its title implied that Britain was stuck in the past and unwilling to face the future. Critiques of this kind nurtured a prevailing mood best characterized as post-Suez *angst*, the botched invasion of Egypt in 1956 having exposed the weakness of Britain's claims to Great Power status in a new world order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. It did not help that Britain's economy, Shanks's particular concern, seemed to have missed out on the economic miracle being enjoyed by West Germany, France and Japan. 'A society that loses interest in material progress is a society on its way to the embalming chamber', Shanks warned bleakly.<sup>1</sup> The message was that attitudes would have to change — or be changed — if the nation's decline was to be arrested.

If there was a unifying theme it was that those who ran the country were out-of-touch with the modern world. An influential collection of essays, published in 1959, had already pointed an accusing finger at 'The Establishment', a term increasingly used to describe Britain's ruling class, the institutions in which it was embodied and the conservative attitudes that it endorsed. Like Shanks, the authors of these essays believed that radical change was required. In particular, they argued that Britain's 'fusty Establishment, with its Victorian views and standards of judgement, must be destroyed'.<sup>2</sup> It was a theme that Harold Wilson and the Labour Party were able to exploit in the campaign preceding their victory at the 1964 general election. Wilson envisioned a new Britain — more democratic and more meritocratic — with a competitive economy transformed by the 'white heat' of science and technology. 'But', he warned, '... revolution cannot become a reality unless we are prepared to make far-reaching changes in economic and social attitudes which permeate our whole system of society'. In particular, he argued, 'those charged with the control of our affairs must be ready to think and speak in the language of our scientific age'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shanks, M., *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 29. For 'state of the nation' literature generally, see Grant, M., 'Historians, Penguin Specials and "State-of-the-Nation" Literature, 1958-64', *Contemporary British History*, 17 (3) (2003), 29-54; see also Sandbrook, D., *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 507-10.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas, H., 'The Establishment and Society', in H. Thomas, ed., *The Establishment* (London: Anthony Blond, 1959), 7-18.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson's speech at Scarborough, 1 October 1963, cited in Pimlott, B., *Harold Wilson*, (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 304.

In this climate it was inevitable that the institutions governing British sport and the 'fusty' Victorianism that they represented should be subjected to critical scrutiny. Some governing bodies — the Jockey Club (1750), which controlled horseracing, and the Marylebone Cricket Club (1787) actually predated Queen Victoria. Others — notably the Football Association (1863), the Rugby Football Union (1871) and the Amateur Athletic Association (1880) - dated from the high Victorian period. All, however, had been shaped by its prevailing values, not least by amateurism and the anti-commercialism, anti-professionalism and social exclusivity that it encompassed.<sup>4</sup> Amateurism had always been as much about cultivating a gentlemanly style as about playing for love rather than money. When seeking to achieve 'effortless superiority' in sport it was important that a gentleman was not seen to strive too hard; it was also considered much better to be an 'all-rounder' (to borrow a term from cricket) than to specialize. An amateur was free to engage in a variety of sporting pursuits and often did.

Such attitudes were nurtured in the 'public' (exclusive and private) schools where the children of the elite were educated and in the old universities (Oxford and Cambridge). Though primarily associated with sporting practices, they informed the British Establishment's view of society and their place in it through to the mid twentieth century. According to the Establishment's critics, one reason why Britain was falling behind other nations was that the gentleman amateur with his outdated nineteenth-century attitudes continued to occupy the commanding heights, not only in sport, but in government and industry. The boards of banks and insurance companies, for example, were said to be overloaded with landowners and retired politicians. They were supposed to provide an 'all-round view' but their lack of business expertise meant that they often stood in the way of progress.<sup>5</sup> According to Arthur Koestler, editor of the melodramatically-entitled *Suicide of a Nation?* (1963), the relative decline of Britain's economy was largely due to 'the cult of amateurishness and the contempt in which proficiency and expertise are held'.<sup>6</sup> Once it had acquired these wider negative connotations, amateurism in sport was doomed.

In the 1950s, the governing bodies of most British sports remained wedded to amateur principles even though they were increasingly difficult to apply. Rules regarding amateur status had been devised in the nineteenth century primarily to regulate cross-class contact in sport. Thus in cricket, for example, 'Gentlemen' (amateurs) were accorded a higher status than 'Players' (professionals), even when they were members of the same team. Until the 1940s this often meant separate changing rooms and entering the field of play by different gates; even in the 1950s, county teams were reluctant to appoint a professional as captain if an amateur was available.<sup>7</sup> In rugby union, especially in England and Scotland, 'professionalism' — broadly defined as any form of payment or any contact with rugby league (where players were paid) — could lead to a lifetime ban, thus ensuring that it was almost exclusively a middle-class sport. As in cricket, the long arm of sports governance reached beyond the pitch. 'Persons who are or have been associated in any capacity with a Rugby League club should be regarded as being ineligible to participate in the affairs of Rugby Union clubs and teams', a 1958 *diktat* explained

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<sup>4</sup> See Holt, R., 'Amateurism and the English Gentleman: the Anatomy of a Sporting Culture', *Japan Journal of the History of Physical Education and Sport*, 27 (2010), 75-83.

<sup>5</sup> See Sampson, A., *Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), 631.

<sup>6</sup> For Koestler's comments see Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 509.

<sup>7</sup> See Wagg, S., "'Time Gentlemen Please": The Decline of Amateur Captaincy in English County Cricket', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2) (2000), 31-59.

helpfully.<sup>8</sup> Even in soccer, where professionalism had been legalized in 1885, some competitions were open only to amateurs, though the rules regarding payment were often breached.<sup>9</sup> For most of the governing bodies of British sport at the start of the 1960s amateurism was a default position they felt obliged to defend.

It was a duty which they were happy to undertake, not least because so many sports officials were steeped in the amateur tradition. As Richard Holt has observed, 'even sports in which professionals played a prominent part were frequently run by amateurs'.<sup>10</sup> However, one of the reasons why the whole edifice of amateurism was vulnerable by the 1960s was that the manner in which many sports were governed was widely regarded as unsatisfactory. The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) had long been a target of criticism, especially when the England team, which it selected and managed on overseas tours, performed badly in international competition ('test matches'). 'I am convinced', a press critic had written in 1951, 'that the MCC is not, and cannot be the ideal body to run English international cricket in these modern times'. Teams were selected for Australian tours by a committee, some of whose members lacked the specialist expertise required for the task. 'It is fantastic that these events are so haphazardly run on our side', he concluded.<sup>11</sup> A review of the state of sports governance nine years later in the *Economist* suggested that little had changed. The MCC, it noted, 'runs cricket very much as it likes, and not everybody would agree that its rules are the best way of keeping cricket alive'. The same article condemned the Rugby Football Union (RFU) for its long-standing vendetta against rugby league, though living in the 1890s was not the only problem. Sport's governing bodies had autocratic tendencies that seemed out of sync with a more egalitarian age. Critics, it was noted, were subject to 'a dubious form of censorship' and disciplined if they dared to speak out.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, when hurdler Alan Pascoe criticised the way that the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) managed the British track and field team, he claimed that officials treated him as if he were leading a peasants' revolt.<sup>13</sup>

It did not help those who sought to defend the *status quo* when British sportsmen and women underachieved in international competition. After 1945 sport was one of the fronts on which ideological warfare was waged and defeats by the Soviet Union and other communist countries acquired a political significance.<sup>14</sup> In these circumstances, British adherence to definitions of amateur status dating from the Victorian period could sometimes seem perverse. In Olympic soccer tournaments, for example, as Football Association (FA) secretary Stanley Rous later reflected, 'our more purist view of amateurism handicapped performance by giving us a more limited selection than some countries with more elastic concepts'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, how

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<sup>8</sup> See Collins, T., *A Social History of English Rugby Union* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 116-21.

<sup>9</sup> See Porter, D., 'Peacefully at Wembley Stadium on 20 April 1974: The Quiet Death of Amateur Football in England', in S. Wagg, ed., *Myths and Milestones in the History of Sport* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 57-79.

<sup>10</sup> Holt, R., 'Amateurism and its Interpretation: The Social Origins of British Sport', *Innovation*, 5 (4) (1992), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Wellings, E.M., *No Ashes for England* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1951), 14; 231-2.

<sup>12</sup> 'Sporting Offer?', *Economist*, 1 October 1960, 21-2.

<sup>13</sup> Polley, M., "'The Amateur Rules': Amateurism and Professionalism in Post-War British Athletics', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2) (2000), 102.

<sup>14</sup> See Bale, J., "'Oscillating antagonism": Soviet-British athletics relations', in S. Wagg and D.L. Andrews, eds., *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 82-99; also Beck, P., 'Britain and the Cold War's "Cultural Olympics": responding to the political drive of Soviet sport, 1945-58', *Contemporary British History*, 19 (2) (2005), 169-85.

<sup>15</sup> Rous, S., *Football Worlds: A Lifetime in Sport* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 123.

could Britain's amateur soccer players expect to compete successfully in Olympic tournaments against state-sponsored 'amateurs' from the Soviet bloc? 'We cannot hold our own', wrote footballer turned journalist Bernard Joy, 'with nations who are prepared to evade the definition of amateur in order to parade their best performers'. In 1956, Great Britain had been eliminated from the Olympic tournament after a 6-1 defeat by Bulgaria, a country admired by Shanks for its 'sense of purpose'.<sup>16</sup> In athletics, dissatisfied elite performers who found the rules relating to amateur status irksome and resented those who upheld them complained that they were unable to race on equal terms with foreign rivals. In his memoirs, published at the end of his career in 1961, Gordon Pirie, one of Britain's best middle-distance runners of the 1950s, wrote bitterly about 'the elderly dictators of British athletics' and the outdated values they embodied. Drastic reforms were required, he argued, if British athletes were to take on the Soviet Union with a reasonable chance of winning, not to mention university-sponsored athletes from the USA.<sup>17</sup>

The influential Wolfenden Committee's report into the state of sport in Britain (1960) had pointed out that most elite performers required some form of financial support if they were to compete for their country at the highest level. 'Obviously', it had noted, 'very few players can afford to take part in, for example, the Olympic Games, the Davis Cup, MCC tours or other sporting competitions abroad unless they are provided with travelling and subsistence expenses'.<sup>18</sup> However, top British athletes, like Pirie, wanted more. They viewed themselves as victims of the rules relating to amateur status, believed that they were entitled to make a living from sport, and could see no reason why they should not be paid openly. In reality, the case for amateurism was already being undermined by covert ('under the counter') payments. Cash inducements to persuade star performers to appear at track and field events were an established part of the sport's black economy.<sup>19</sup> Such payments were not confined to athletics; they were endemic in other 'amateur' sports. Rugby union in Wales, for example, was notorious for 'blindsight remuneration' and amateur cricketers, footballers and tennis players were often paid generous expenses which more than compensated for their time and effort.<sup>20</sup> Such breaches of the amateur code undoubtedly had a corrosive effect. They generated, as the Wolfenden Committee observed, 'an attitude of cynicism and distrust, made all the worse by the fact that from the nature of the case the player concerned is almost always a prominent and successful exponent of his particular sport'.<sup>21</sup> 'Shamateurism' was very much an open secret by the 1960s. Crucially, it undermined the moral case for amateurism just as those who sought to defend it were coming under attack.

The word 'crisis' should be used carefully by historians but it seems appropriate to describe the condition of many British sports at this time. It was particularly severe in English cricket. Cash-strapped county clubs played in front of dwindling crowds, match attendances having fallen from 2 million in 1950 to 750,000 in 1960.<sup>22</sup> It was noticeable that cricket's problems

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<sup>16</sup> Joy, B., 'A Dull Olympiad (1956)', in A.H. Fabian and G. Green, eds., *Association Football* (London: Caxton Publishing Co., 1960), vol. 4, 480; Shanks, *Stagnant Society*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> See Polley, 'Amateur Rules', 100-6.

<sup>18</sup> *Sport and the Community: the Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport* (London: Central Council of Physical Recreation, 1960), 66.

<sup>19</sup> Polley, 'Amateur Rules', 104-5.

<sup>20</sup> On payments in amateur sport generally see Collins, *Social History of Rugby Union*, 185-66.

<sup>21</sup> *Sport and the Community*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> Birley, D., *A Social History of English Cricket* (London: Aurum Press, 1999), 293.

multiplied as British consumers became more affluent. As a summer sport it was especially vulnerable to changing leisure patterns as people began to spend their surplus income on cars and holidays. Increasingly television, a potential revenue stream that sport had not yet learned to tap, offered an attractive alternative for those who preferred to watch in the comfort of their own homes. This meant that the crowds stayed away even when the quality of sport entertainment on offer was excellent. 'From the domestic angle, 1961 was quite outstanding and the only tragedy was that more people did not come through the turnstiles to watch', observed England cricketer Trevor Bailey ruefully.<sup>23</sup> By this time 'Soccer's Missing Millions' had become a sports page cliché. The only consolation for football, an *Economist* survey noted in 1965, was that it had 'fared no worse than other sports'.<sup>24</sup> Attendances the AAA's annual championship meeting held at the White City in London, an important source of income for track and field sports, were also declining rapidly, from 46,000 in 1952 to only 17,000 seven years later. By the mid 1960s bankruptcy was regarded as a 'very real threat'.<sup>25</sup>

It is possible to write of a period of 'amateur hegemony' in British sport because from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century 'most sports were run by organizations and individuals proclaiming amateur status'.<sup>26</sup> The conditions prevailing in the 1960s and beyond meant that this could no longer be assumed as governing bodies abandoned their commitment to an ideal that became unsustainable. Though its members disagreed about what should be done, the Wolfenden Committee had reported that it was 'unanimous in the conviction that there is something wrong'.<sup>27</sup> At a time when amateurism was vulnerable, the sports institutions in which it had become embedded were too weak to resist the impulse to modernize. We should not be surprised that cricket, the sport in which the crisis conditions were most severe, was the first to move when it abandoned the class-based distinction between amateurs and professionals in 1962. Given the MCC's reputation for conservatism, this decision had enormous symbolic significance and Wilson seized on it as an example of the radical change that was needed if the British economy was to become more competitive. 'In a country', he observed, '... which has now begun to take cricket seriously enough for even the MCC to abolish the distinction between Gentlemen and Players, we are still prepared to allow too much of British industry, on which alone we depend to prevent this country from being a second-class power, to be officered from the pages of *Debrett*'.<sup>28</sup> For once, the MCC seemed to be ahead of the game, looking to the future rather than the past.

It is important to recognize that amateurism was not simply the antithesis of professionalism. For the gentlemen who had created the ruling institutions of British sport in the nineteenth century it was also a bulwark against commerce. Back in 1897, 'Pa' Jackson, founder of the Corinthians Football Club and an ardent propagandist for amateurism, had resigned from

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<sup>23</sup> Bailey, T., *Championship Cricket: A Review of County Cricket since 1945* (London: Sportsman's Book Club, 1962), 218.

<sup>24</sup> 'Briefing on Football', *Economist*, 25 December 1965, 1419-22; see also Russell, D., *Football and the English: A Social History of Association Football in England, 1863-1995* (Preston: Carnegie Publishing, 1997), 131-8.

<sup>25</sup> Polley, M., 'The Amateur Rules', 88-91

<sup>26</sup> Holt, 'Amateurism and its Interpretation', 19; 25-7.

<sup>27</sup> *Sport and the Community*, 67-8.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson's speech at the Royal Albert Hall, 5 April 1964, in *The New Britain: Labour's Plan Outlined by Harold Wilson: Selected Speeches 1964* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1964), 131-2. *Debrett's Peerage* is the genealogical guide to the British aristocracy, published annually.

soccer's FA council in protest against the increasing influence of those 'who made a business of the game and consequently could no longer treat it as sport'.<sup>29</sup> Keeping the English gentlemen at the forefront of sports governance was one way of keeping the commerce in check. From the 1960s onwards, however, the economics of British sport demanded greater involvement from those who viewed it primarily as a business opportunity.

Thus, abolishing the distinction between Gentlemen and Players had more than symbolic significance. The professionalization of English cricket's labour force underpinned the era of intensified commercialization that was to follow. In order that the game form to which traditionalists were devoted (three-day inter-county matches) might continue, it was necessary to subsidise it via the revenue that could be derived from what was often referred to as 'instant cricket'; firstly the Gillette Cup (1963) and then the John Player League (1969) and the Benson and Hedges Cup (1972), each offering a variety of matches that guaranteed a result at the end of a single day's play. This proved more attractive to spectators, not least because it gave cricket two 'Cup Finals' every season. It also opened cricket up to commercial sponsors who were drawn to these new forms of the game because it facilitated exposure of their brands on television. Cricket's fortunes were not instantly resolved but by the early 1970s it was clear that the crisis had passed. By 1973 the *Economist* was reporting that the ancient game was experiencing 'a vigorous revival'.<sup>30</sup>

The arrival of open tennis at Wimbledon a few years later represented another important departure from sport's amateur past. Like cricket, tennis was subject to the overriding influence of a private members' club, the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (1877), whose annual tournament at Wimbledon was a money-spinner. At the start of the 1960s, Wimbledon was an amateur tournament, though competitors were reported to be receiving payments of up to £100 above the actual cost of their travel, accommodation and subsistence.<sup>31</sup> Even bending the rules in this blatant fashion, however, was not enough to dissuade top amateurs from turning professional. This meant that many of the world's best players no longer appeared at Wimbledon. Paying spectators and a growing television audience continued to find it attractive — perhaps as much for its ambience as for the tennis — and this helped to sustain resistance to change for a few more years but it was increasingly clear that Wimbledon was unlikely to survive as a major tournament if it relied on its 'strawberries and cream' atmosphere alone.

For tennis, the pressure of external competition was a critical factor that had to be taken into account. The International Lawn Tennis Federation had come very close to sanctioning open tennis in 1960. Major championships in the USA, Australia and France were moving in that direction. 'If Wimbledon does not follow them', argued the *Economist*, 'it could then no longer claim to be one of the top tournaments of the world'.<sup>32</sup> By 1967, the continuing drift of top amateurs into the professional ranks finally tipped the balance. When the All England Club announced that the 1968 tournament would be open, it was in the knowledge that 'not merely the reigning Wimbledon champion but an entire supporting cast [was] disappearing into the professional ranks'.<sup>33</sup> It was 'game, set and match' for professionalism and the intensified

<sup>29</sup> Jackson, N.L., *Sporting Days and Sporting Ways* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1932), 101.

<sup>30</sup> 'It wouldn't be Cricket', *Economist*, 5 May 1973, 28.

<sup>31</sup> A payment of £100 in 1960 would have been worth £1796 in 2010, a modest reward for two weeks of 'Grand Slam' tennis; <http://bankofengland.co.uk/education/inflation/calculator/flas/index.htm> (accessed 2 June 2011).

<sup>32</sup> 'No Love Match', *Economist*, 2 July 1960, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, R., *Open Tennis: the First Twenty Years* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), 13.



commercialization that came with it. Thereafter, though Wimbledon marketed itself as a tournament steeped in tradition, it embraced the corporate sector, supplying 'up-market entertainment in the form of hospitality marquees, plus tickets'. As the *Economist* noted in 1979, eleven years after the first open tournament, Wimbledon was 'an incongruously amateur shrine for the sport that can boast the largest number of teenage millionaires'.<sup>34</sup> British golf, another quintessentially middle-class sport, followed a broadly similar path after 1971.<sup>35</sup> This would not have been possible if amateurism — along with Victorianism - had not already been in full retreat.

The transition from amateur/professional to open competition was a lengthy and untidy process. Conditions varied from sport to sport — as did definitions of amateurism — and the contingent circumstances were different in each case. In English soccer, amateurs and professionals had co-existed reasonably comfortably once the gentlemanly footballers who defected from the FA in 1907 had returned to the fold in 1914.<sup>36</sup> Thereafter amateur and professional soccer developed along parallel lines which were breached only occasionally as a few amateurs could reach the standards required to play in the professional game. No amateur had been selected to represent England at full international level since Bernard Joy's appearance against Belgium in 1936. As far as the governance of soccer was concerned, however, the old guard retreated slowly and many of them were still in place in the 1960s. Amateur traditionalists retained some influence on the FA Council using it mainly to ensure that commercialism, as represented by the businessmen who owned the Football League's 92 professional clubs, was kept under control. Club directors were not permitted to claim payment for their services and annual dividends — in the unlikely event of a club making a profit — were subject in the 1960s to a 5 per cent ceiling. Even twenty years later — when the ceiling had been raised to 10 per cent — the *Economist* could still claim that FA regulations 'show a distaste for anyone seeking as an investor to make a profit out of professional soccer'.<sup>37</sup>

It has to be said that the *Economist*, in its determination to depict professional soccer as an inefficient business in need of modernization, was inclined to overstate its case. In reality, amateurism, in the form that would have been recognized by the gentlemen who had founded the FA in 1863, had already largely disappeared. For many years the FA had engaged in an intermittent campaign against shamateurism in English soccer, seeking to detect and punish the clubs who made covert payments and the players who received them. By the late 1960s, however, it was clear that this had failed and that the senior amateur game was awash with cash payments, as it had been for many years. It was embarrassing when evidence surfaced relating to Enfield, winners of the FA's high-profile Amateur Cup competition in 1969, which amounted to 'a severe indictment of an amateur club'.<sup>38</sup> With shamateurism proving so difficult to stamp out the balance of opinion amongst those who governed English soccer shifted in favour of abolishing the distinction between amateurs and professionals altogether, following the path already taken by cricket and tennis. Thus the FA, by declaring in 1972 that all

<sup>34</sup> 'Wimbledon's Money Machine', *Economist*, 23 June 1979, 120-1.

<sup>35</sup> See 'Prize Results', *Economist*, 25 December 1971, 75; also Physick, R. and Holt, R., 'Big Money: the Tournament Player and the PGA, 1945-75', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2) (2000), 68-9.

<sup>36</sup> See Porter, D., 'Revenge of the Crouch End Vampires: The AFA, the FA and English Football's "Great Split", 1907-14', *Sport in History*, 26 (3) (2006), 406-28.

<sup>37</sup> 'Soccer's Financial Score', *Economist*, 9 May 1981, 116-7.

<sup>38</sup> See Porter, 'Peacefully at Wembley Stadium', 71-5.

footballers under its jurisdiction, whether paid or unpaid, would in future be referred to simply as 'players', admitted that it could rid soccer of shamateurism only by abolishing amateurism. This meant, as *The Times* noted, that 'the ideals and values of another age' were abandoned. Later on the same day, the Billiards and Snooker Control Council confirmed the trend towards open competition in sport, voting unanimously in favour of designating all its 'amateurs' as 'players'.<sup>39</sup>

In some sports, notably track and field athletics, the amateur hegemony was sustained externally by a strong connection with the Olympic movement. Thus, though elite performers frequently complained about the arrangements under which they competed, the AAA could resist reform as long as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) remained formally committed to the amateur ideal. From the 1950s onwards, however, this commitment was much criticised, not least because the flexible definition of amateurism favoured by the IOC gave a distinct advantage to athletes from the Soviet Union and its allies. 'All major sports will have to become honestly professional', argued the *Economist* in 1981, 'or else fall further and further into communist hands'.<sup>40</sup> Olympic amateurism was also undermined by the accelerating pace of commercialization. 'Athletes were corrupted, rules and regulations were mocked, money flowed, hypocrisy flourished', as historian Allen Guttman has noted of the 1968 Winter Games at Grenoble.<sup>41</sup> Under the presidencies of Killanin (1972-80) and Samaranch (1980-2001), the Olympic movement shed what was left of its antipathy towards both commercialism and professionalism. So many exceptions were made to Rule 26, which prohibited professionals from competing, that it was effectively redundant by the end of the 1980s. 'Olympic athletes', as Guttman observes, 'were free, at last, of the hypocritical need to pretend that they were just ordinary blokes that trained a bit after work'.<sup>42</sup> They were free, in other words, of the vestigial burden of nineteenth-century amateurism where 'effortless superiority' had separated the Gentlemen from the Players.

The outlook of AAA officials appears to have been especially conservative. When Britain's track and field team travelled to the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne men and women were required to sit at opposite ends of the aeroplane.<sup>43</sup> Many of the criticisms that Pirie and his contemporaries had made in the 1950s were repeated by dissatisfied track and field stars in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>44</sup> This meant that the pace of change in Britain was to a large extent dictated by the IOC and the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF), the governing body of world athletics. Thus a significant watershed was crossed in 1981 when the IAAF approved a scheme whereby appearance fees and money derived from advertising and sponsorship could be paid into trust funds on which athletes could draw to finance their careers in sport. They were also free to benefit from whatever was left in the fund on their retirement. Though the *Economist*, ever eager that sport should surrender unconditionally to the ideology of the marketplace, dismissed the scheme as 'half-baked', it was clear that amateurism had been fatally

<sup>39</sup> 'FA abolish the word amateur and pass problem to the tax man', *The Times*, 28 November 1972, 11.

<sup>40</sup> 'The Games They Play', *Economist*, 9 August 1980, 13-14.

<sup>41</sup> See Guttman, A., *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 128.

<sup>42</sup> See Guttman, *The Olympics*, 142-4; 166-7.

<sup>43</sup> Crump, J., 'Athletics', in T. Mason, ed., *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54.

<sup>44</sup> See Polley, 'Amateur Rules', 99-106.



compromised. The popularity of Hugh Hudson's movie *Chariots of Fire* (1981), a highly-fictionalized account of the 1924 Olympics that cast a nostalgic glow over the amateur era, merely underlined the point that it was over. If anyone had missed the point, the £90,000 paid to Zola Budd to run against Mary Slaney at Crystal Palace, London, in 1985 — a re-run of their controversial race at the 1984 Los Angeles games — would have brought it home forcefully.<sup>45</sup>

The 1960s had marked a decisive phase in dismantling the amateur hegemony but it was only the beginning of a process that took more than thirty years to complete. It was not until the 1990s that rugby union, defined by the commitment to amateurism more than any other British sport, turned its back on its own history and severed what had been fondly referred to within the game as 'the golden thread that binds us to our founders'. Since 1895, when most of the clubs based in the North had defected over the issue of 'broken-time' payments, rugby union in England had sought to be everything that rugby league was not — payment of players was forbidden, commerce was kept at a safe distance, league and cup competitions were shunned.<sup>46</sup> The culture of the game and the very way that it was played was resistant to modernization, especially in England and Scotland where it was almost exclusively a middle-class sport. 'We were ... happy in the traditions of the game', former international Derek Wyatt has recalled of the late 1970s and early 1980s. 'Coaching was still a dirty word, training was largely unscientific and progress something that happened in America'.<sup>47</sup> All this unravelled with startling rapidity in the eight years spanning rugby union's first three World Cup tournaments in 1987, 1991 and 1995.

To some extent, the amateur regime in rugby union imploded because of its own internal contradictions. Though players were sometimes hounded for minor breaches of the regulations, a blind eye was often turned to payment in Wales where more players came from working-class backgrounds and could be tempted by offers from rugby league clubs to turn professional. Yet, even in England, the rules regarding amateurism were often broken, especially after the RFU had embraced sponsored cup and league competitions as a source of revenue with the John Player Cup in 1975 and the Courage Clubs Championship in 1987. It was a trend that accelerated rapidly in the late 1980s and early 1990s when rugby union began to market itself as a global game thus increasing the demands made on elite players at international level.

In these circumstances the diehard amateur stance of the RFU 'Establishment' — along with its amateurish approach to running its own business — was increasingly difficult to defend. 'The old Freddies who still dominate England's rugby bureaucracy', the *Economist* noted in 1987, 'insist that players should make sacrifices for the love of the game'. They were offering only £15 a day 'pocket money' to players on World Cup duty in Australia and New Zealand at a time when the potential revenue from international matches at Twickenham was unrealised because tickets were underpriced'.<sup>48</sup> As in athletics, it was external pressures that proved decisive, particularly the advent in 1995 of Super League rugby, bankrolled by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which confronted rugby union in Australia and New Zealand

<sup>45</sup> See Crump, 'Athletics', 55-6; also 'Chariots of Fire', *Economist*, 5 September 1981, 32.

<sup>46</sup> For these developments see Collins, *Social History of Rugby Union*, 198-205. Broken-time payments were a form of compensation paid to players for loss of wages that they would have earned from their full-time employment if they had not been playing rugby.

<sup>47</sup> Wyatt, D., *Rugby DisUnion: The Making of Three World Cups* (London: Vista, 1995), 17.

<sup>48</sup> 'Pay the Game', *Economist*, 24 January 1987, 30.

with the prospect of a mass defection of star players into the paid ranks of rugby league. In these circumstances the major rugby union powers in the southern hemisphere — Australia, New Zealand and South Africa — were happy to abandon the pretence that their elite players were amateurs, leaving the British rugby authorities, along with France and Italy, with no choice but to follow the same path.

By this time amateurism had become impossible to defend, not least because it had become impossible to define with any confidence. A committee set up by the International Rugby Board (IRB) admitted openly in 1995 that 'the term amateurism is now incapable of a constructive or clear explanation'.<sup>49</sup> The rules had been broken so often that they were meaningless. Top rugby union players in the early 1990s may not have been paid wages but the generous expenses that they claimed, along with non-cash benefits such as sponsored cars, ensured that they were professionals in all but name. 'The fact that they are not paid a wage or a salary', noted Gerald Kaufman, chair of a parliamentary committee that investigated the relationship between rugby union and rugby league, 'might seem to some people a dodge to preserve the myth of amateurism'.<sup>50</sup> One of the reasons why the RFU's last-ditch defence of a principle that they could no longer explain appeared so anachronistic was that by the mid 1990s rugby union stood almost alone. Rowing, another sport with a long history of social exclusivity, held out a little longer; the famous Henley Regatta, the equivalent of Wimbledon in tennis, becoming an open competition for the first time in 1998. As in rugby union, this decision effectively legitimized arrangements that already applied to elite performers, such as Olympic gold medallists Steven Redgrave and Matthew Pinsent.<sup>51</sup>

The unfavourable conditions which many sports were experiencing by the early 1960s generated a series of reforms which were of long-term significance. It was not until the 1990s, however, that the amateur hegemony that had been established in the mid nineteenth century came to an end. Even then, amateurism persisted in sports which had low spectator and media appeal, such as field hockey and lacrosse, and also in some exclusively female sports such as netball. In the sense that the vast majority of those who participate in sport — Sunday footballers in public parks, cricketers on the village green, swimmers at the local pool, 'fun runners' — ask for and receive no payment, amateurism continues to flourish, though its meaning has been progressively redefined over the years since 1960.<sup>52</sup> When it was said that Jack Hobbs, the master professional of English cricket in the first half of the twentieth century, played 'like an amateur', it was intended as a compliment, signifying that he performed on the field of play — batting stylishly and behaving impeccably — in the manner expected of a gentleman, his social superior. Now that amateurism is largely associated with sport as a recreational activity, the word is generally used to denote a relatively low level of competence, certainly lower than would be expected from a professional. 'Forty years ago', noted a rugby journalist in 2007 on the eve of the annual match between Oxford and Cambridge Universities, 'it was not uncommon for half those on show at Twickenham to become — and in some cases already to be — internationals'. Standards, however, had fallen and a match which had once

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<sup>49</sup> See Hinchcliffe, D., *Rugby's Class War: Bans, Boot Money and Parliamentary Battles* (London: London League Publications Ltd, 2000), 75-84; also Collins, *Social History of Rugby Union*, 205.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Hinchcliffe, *Rugby's Class War*, 83.

<sup>51</sup> See Holt R. and Mason, T., *Sport in Britain 1945-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 85.

<sup>52</sup> Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 61-2.

showcased some of the best amateur talent available no longer featured players capable of playing at the highest level. 'With rampant professionalism in rugby', he asked, 'how long will the Varsity Match retain its relevance?'<sup>53</sup>

While the amateur hegemony persisted it kept rampant professionalism in check. The 'gentleman amateur' of the Victorian era wanted to ensure that the professional, especially the working-class professional, had only limited opportunities to challenge him on the field of play, thus ensuring that the social order was not turned upside-down too often. Moreover, while the amateur was expected to lead, the professional was required to defer. Amateurism thus helped to ensure that Britain's class system was reproduced in the world of sport. These structures proved remarkably resilient. 'British sport', as historian Norman Baker has observed, 'fits well into the conception of post-Second World War society in which the continuities were prized and came to prevail over any significant impulse for fundamental change'.<sup>54</sup> Thus class remained the critical factor in determining an individual's relationship with sport. When starting a career in first-class cricket in the 1950s, for example, the choice of playing either as an amateur or as a professional was largely determined by class. No cricketer who had learned the game at public school and university would have considered playing as a professional. As a prominent amateur of the 1950s recalled: 'The class system of the time — and nowhere was it more starkly illustrated than in cricket — determined that playing cricket for a living was a notch down the social scale'.<sup>55</sup>

From the 1960s onwards this position became progressively less tenable as links with the Victorian age and its prevailing values weakened. As anxieties grew regarding the relative decline of the British economy, it seemed sensible to look to professionals - those with managerial, scientific and technological expertise — rather than to amateurs to reverse the trend.<sup>56</sup> In everyday language, 'amateur' became a pejorative term used to describe someone who could not be relied upon to do a job well. Informed by a triumphant executive that his television company had secured the rights to cover the 1968 Olympic Games, show-business entrepreneur Lew Grade is said to have responded: 'That's amateurs, isn't it? We don't want amateurs. Get professionals'.<sup>57</sup> But it was not merely a question of efficiency. Arguably, British society did become progressively more democratic and more meritocratic in the last third of the twentieth century and this was reflected in greater significance being assigned to social inclusion and equality of opportunity. The gentleman, and the Victorian sporting values he embodied, could not survive in such an environment. As the IRB acknowledged in 1995, amateurism was 'not easily defensible as a social or moral ethic judged by the standards of today'.<sup>58</sup>

Amateurism had not only held rampant professionalism in check, it had also regulated the role of business in sport. As it has recently been argued, pursuing sport for enjoyment alone signified detachment from the corrosive influences of the market, competition and technocracy.

<sup>53</sup> 'New World Leaves Oxbridge Downstream', *Independent* (Sport), 10 December 2007, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Baker, N., 'The Amateur Ideal in a Society of Equality: Change and Continuity in post-Second World War British Sport, 1945-48', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12 (1) (1995), 100.

<sup>55</sup> Bailey, J., *Trevor Bailey: A Life in Cricket* (London: Methuen, 1993), 20.

<sup>56</sup> See Holt, 'Amateurism and the English Gentleman', 82.

<sup>57</sup> Obituary for Bill Ward, *The Guardian*, 26 October 1999, cited in Smith, A. and Porter, D., 'Introduction', in A. Smith and D. Porter, eds., *Amateurs and Professionals in Post-War British Sport* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), x.

<sup>58</sup> See Hinchcliffe, *Rugby's Class War*, 79.

In the era of amateur hegemony, no-one could claim that sport, like journalism, was simply 'a branch of commerce'. Just as the 'pro' was expected to defer to the amateur on the field of play, so the businessman was expected to defer to the gentleman in the governance of sport. Thus, like rampant professionalism, the beast of rampant commercialism was tamed. On the field, professional soccer players were subject to the jurisdiction of the FA where the influence of nineteenth-century amateurism lingered until the 1970s; the laws of the game required that they be penalised for 'ungentlemanly conduct'. Off the field, the businessmen who served as directors of Football League clubs operated within a quasi-legal framework which denied them opportunities to maximize profits. As FA secretary Frederick Wall had observed in the 1930s, there were 'too many limitations in football for the ordinary investor, and no sane person would ever dream of hoping to make a fortune out of football'.<sup>59</sup> In the 1960s this still applied. Over the last fifty years, however, the relationship between sport and business has been transformed, firstly by sponsorship, secondly by the media.<sup>60</sup> Its ever-expanding parameters may be difficult to define but 'Sportsbiz', like 'Showbiz', has arrived and is here to stay. 'One "sports" story after another in recent weeks', complained a *Guardian* journalist in 2007, 'has been not about the bewitching things that athletes can do but instead about the love of money that we are told is the root of all evil, and that surely now infects all sports organizations'.<sup>61</sup> It is now clear that the long drawn-out conclusion to the period of amateur hegemony was both a prelude to and a necessary precondition of the intensive commercial exploitation of British sport.

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<sup>59</sup> Wall, F., *50 Years of Football 1884-1934* (Cleethorpes: Soccer Books Ltd., 2006), 107; first published in 1935.

<sup>60</sup> For this transformation see Porter, D., 'British Sport Transformed: Sport, Business and the Media since 1960', in R. Coopey and P. Lyth, eds., *Business in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 330-55.

<sup>61</sup> 'A Dirty Old Game', *Guardian*, 18 September 2007, 18.