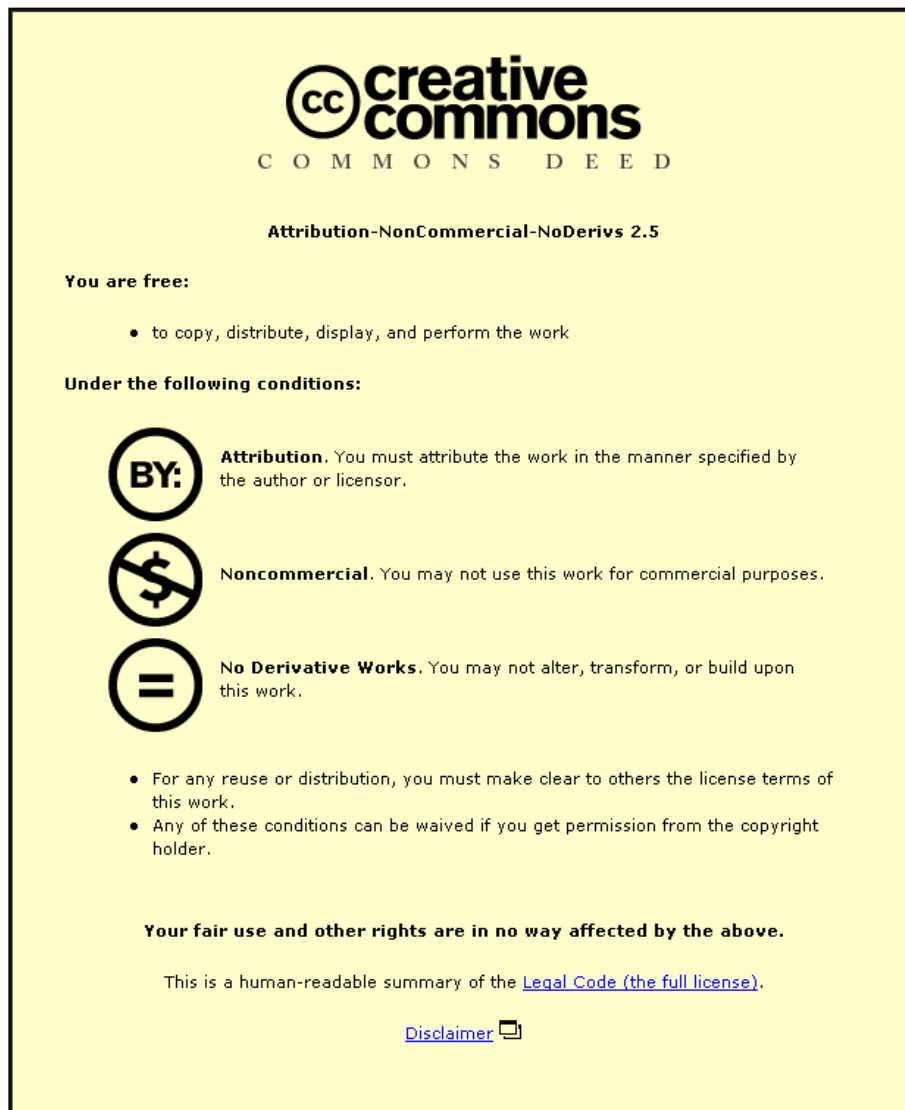


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# Sport and globalization: transnational dimensions

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**Abstract** The aims of this special issue are to both raise the social scientific status of sport and to advance understanding of transnational processes through the role of sport in global change. The Introduction argues that sport, like globalization, can be understood in transdisciplinary terms, and the papers included contributions informed by sociology, anthropology, political sciences and history. As well as placing the issue in the context of recent studies of sport and globalization, the Introduction outlines the seven papers. Placed together they move from analyses of broader globalizing and multi-sport issues towards consideration of how transnational processes impact upon individual sports – with examples from cricket, baseball and association football – ending with regional and national dimensions.

**Keywords** GLOBALIZATION, TRANSNATIONALISM, GLOCALIZATION, POST-WESTERNIZATION

In putting together this special issue, we have been concerned to meet two closely connected objectives. First, we have sought to raise the social scientific status of sport, primarily by seeking contributions from leading mainstream scholars. Second, we have been concerned to advance understanding of transnational processes by examining the highly important role of sport in global change.

Sport has been a hitherto under-explored field of enquiry for mainstream social scientists and global studies specialists. Sport figures occasionally rather than consistently in mainstream social scientific journals and, far less frequently, in the work of leading international scholars. In part, this may be explained by the emergence of 'sport studies' as a thriving, differentiated zone of multi-disciplinary scholarship, wherein globalization has been integral to research and debates since the mid-1990s. In turn, dialogue between mainstream social scientists and sport specialists

has been rather circumscribed. We hope that this special issue of *Global Networks* provides an ideal venue for traversing that artificial divide, to ignite that conversation.

In a broad social scientific sense, it is eminently reasonable to have this debate speak to global issues and processes. Globalization is the axial theme of contemporary times, and the broad field of 'global studies' has mushroomed enormously since the mid-1980s, engendering diverse transdisciplinary and transnational networks of scholars. More particularly, like other transdisciplinary substantive fields, global studies have tended to lack a significant sport focus compared to investigations of other cultural forms, such as religion. Yet, we would argue strongly that sport is an increasingly significant subject for global studies, in its dual role as a long-term motor and metric of transnational change.

Sport historians have indicated the extensive interconnections of sport and global processes. The globalization of sport 'took off' from the 1870s onwards, as the 'games revolution' colonized British imperial outposts (e.g. cricket in Asia and Australasia), the 'global game' of football underwent mass diffusion along British trading and educational routes (e.g. in Europe, South America), and distinctive indigenous sports were forged as part of the invention of national traditions in emerging modern societies (e.g. baseball, American football in the United States) (Guttmann 1995; Mangan 1987).

In recent times, sport's transnational status is most perspicuously revealed through the raw data and political conflicts generated by sporting 'mega-events' and their controlling bodies. Consider, for example, the global dimensions of the Olympic Games. According to research commissioned by the governing International Olympic Committee (IOC), the 2004 Olympics in Athens were watched, at least in part, by 3.9 billion of the world's population, producing a cumulative global audience of around 40 billion for the 17 day event (*USA Today*, 12 October 2004). Financially, the Olympics are a major transnational industry, with projected revenues for the Beijing 2008 event standing at \$3 billion (*Forbes*, 31 January 2007). Olympism has a global political reach, with 203 National Olympic Committees affiliated to the IOC, giving 11 more national members than the United Nations. The Olympic movement has been a strong catalyst in advancing sport's public status as a human right, and as a medium for development and humanitarian work among NGOs. Yet in turn, Olympism has been critiqued by new social movements and investigative journalists for alleged corruption, and the implicit toleration of athlete harm and infringement of civil liberties (Lenskyj 2000). Whatever one thinks of Olympism and other sporting realms as

cultural forms, it is clear that their transnational importance and salience to social science cannot be ignored.

In moving to locate sport's place within mainstream social science, and with reference to the global context, we have assembled a collection of articles by some of the world's most influential scholars, notably those with major standing in globalization studies. Roland Robertson (1970, 1992; Nettl and Robertson 1968; Robertson and Scholte 2007) has been an international authority on world society, social theory and religion since the mid-1960s, and is arguably the founding figure of globalization studies in social science. George Ritzer (1997, 2004) is a highly versatile and worldrenowned social theorist who has recently amended his influential McDonaldization thesis to encompass global processes. In sociology, Barry Smart (1999, 2005) is a globally recognized theorist who has made telling contributions on McDonaldization, postmodernism and post-structuralism; Frank Lechner (1991; Boli and Lechner 2005) has emerged as a global standing in the distinct yet interconnected sociologies of globalization and religion; and Chris Rumford (2002; Rumford and Delanty 2005) has emerged as a leading theorist of European political cultures. In anthropology, William Kelly (1985, 2004) is long established as one of the world's leading scholars on Japanese society and East Asia, while the prolific Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2003, 2007) has been pivotal in shifting world anthropology's focus to the global dimensions of local processes.

Our three contributors from sport studies have diverse disciplinary, theoretical and substantive backgrounds: David Andrews (2006) in blending cultural studies and contemporary social theory to explore national and global sport cultures; Gary Armstrong (1998, 2001) through anthropological ethnographies of local and transnational football cultures; and the sociologist Richard Giulianotti (1999, 2005) through analytical and qualitative studies of world football, sport and globalization. All three, most notably Armstrong and Giulianotti (e.g. 1998, 2004), have enjoyed extensive prior collaborations, on transnational sporting themes that bring together international fields of scholars.

Certainly, this special issue does not have a standing start. Some of our mainstream social scientific contributors have examined sport in other work, notably Smart (2005) on sport stars; Kelly's (1997, 1998, for example) various studies of Japanese baseball; Lechner (2007) on Dutch football; Ritzer (and Stillman 2001) on baseball stadiums; and Robertson on global football (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004, 2006, 2007). However, this special issue does provide the first extensive and selfcontained examination of sport by leading mainstream social scientists.

## Contents

We have arranged the articles to allow the reader to move from reflecting on the general to the more particular aspects of globalization and sport. Thus, we move from analyses of broader globalizing and multi-sport issues towards consideration of how transnational processes impact upon individual sports, and regional and national dimensions.

The first three articles explore the complex interrelations of the local and the global in relation to a variety of sports. Our opening article, by Barry Smart, investigates the historical and political economic aspects of sport's globalization. Crucial historical transformations identified by Smart include sport's global institutionalization, its heightened mediatization, and the growth of consumerism along with the proliferation of sporting merchandise. The next contribution brings together David Andrews and George Ritzer to explore the inextricable interpenetrations of local and global processes within a variety of modern sports. The analysis elaborates Ritzer's (2004) earlier dichotomy of the 'glocal' and the 'global' to argue that all sporting institutions, practices and identities contain variable and highly complex mixtures of creativity and dependency, in cultural and commercial terms. Our third paper, by the leading global anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, assesses the uneven globalization of sports, and so challenges the presumption of a constant local/global dialogue. Deploying metaphors of evolution and survival, Eriksen observes that many sports have neither sought nor experienced their worldwide popularization, in part by their failure or reluctance to undergo translation into new terrain.

Our next three articles discuss globalization issues in regard to different individual sports; notably, each discussion accords particular consideration to Asia. First, interweaving the theories of globalization, transnationalism, connectivity (and consciousness) and cosmopolitanism, the article by Giulianotti and Robertson explores the much-neglected social dimensions of globalization with reference to football. Illustrative case-studies are drawn from supporter formations, sport journalism, and the specific realm of Japanese football. Next, in a rich analysis, William Kelly explores and explains the limited global reach of baseball. While the quintessential American sport underwent substantial glocalization in Japan, to become 'samurai baseball', Kelly demonstrates that its global diffusion has been hampered rather ironically by the centrist power and self-protectionism of North America's major commercial power in baseball, MLB. Analysis of the transnational aspects of cricket allows Chris Rumford, in his article, to challenge contemporary theories of globalization and postcolonialism. Rumford argues that cricket's recent history illustrates processes of 'postwesternization', which point in part to the rising global

influence of the East. In cricket, postwesternization is signalled by the huge commercial value and popular appeal of one-day international fixtures in Asia, and the emerging hegemony of that region within the sport's governance.

We conclude with two articles that situate national sporting cultures firmly within 'the global'. To most international football followers, the Netherlands have been a metonym for beautiful, free-flowing 'total football' since the early 1970s. Yet, as the article by Frank Lechner explains, this 'invented tradition' is demythologized by many Dutch football fans themselves, and has contributed significantly to the constant reformulation of the Netherlands' national identity within the global context. The final article explores football in Liberia, where a maelstrom of individual, local, national and transnational forces, are struggling to dominate and simply to survive within sport and society. Drawing upon extensive field-work in the war-torn state, Gary Armstrong examines the particular case of George Weah, a retired world football star, failed national presidential candidate, local folk hero, and vehicle for various transnational companies and NGOs. Weah's remarkable and inconclusive story embodies many of the conflicts, complexities and ambiguities that this special issue seeks to capture in regard to the uneven relationships between local, national and transnational forces, as illuminated through sport.

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