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Special Issue Foreword On the Political Economy of Amateur Athletics

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In its most artless definition, *political economy* refers to the study of inter- and intra-state transaction—concerned in large part with the dialectics of state governance and the production/consumption functions therein. Many of us, with varying degrees of deliberation, have read the works of forerunning political economists such as Adam Smith (c. 1723-1790), David Ricardo (c. 1772-1823), Thomas Malthus (c. 1766-1834), John Stuart Mill (c. 1806-1873), Karl Marx (c. 1818-1883), and Thorstein Veblen (c. 1857-1929). These classic political economists and their contemporaries shared a concern for the extent to which land, labor, income, capital, and the population derived value from, and maintained contingency with, state polity. While each diverged from the others in how to best organize the State in relation to markets and exchange activities (and vice versa) so as to optimize the citizenry's well-being, these scholars and their contemporaries laid the foundations for the long-standing field of inquiry fixed on exploring how various national political systems (democracy, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, etc.), markets, and political and economic behavior could bring about national prosperity, maximize individual freedom, or raise collective utility.

From an historical perspective, the timing of the modern political economy project makes sense: the Peace of Westphalia (c. 1648) brought national self-determination to many nation-states in

Europe (and beyond). With this newfound sovereignty, nation-states formed various governance and political systems aimed at optimizing national economic growth, population growth, and geopolitical positionality. As the field developed and evolved—and certainly in the period following the publication of Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics* (c. 1890) through to the rise of a global *market doxa* that would come to hold sway over most of the developed world a century later—its practitioners largely focused on the *economics* in political economy; that is, economic activity in the national and global environment. This economic structure is evident in the neoclassical economic theories first envisaged by Austrian School theorists such as Ludwig von Mises and Freidrich von Hayek and further fleshed out in the theories of Chicago School economists such as Milton Friedman and the policies informed by those theories and as put into practice by Ronald Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Augusto Pinochet in Chile, and Paul Keating and Roger Douglas in Australasia (to name but a few).

This ever-evolving political economy has, of course, brought about important initiatives and changes in public policy. This political economy has helped curb or abet intensive/extensive national growth, inflation and stagnation, multi-scalar economic development, population growth, national (un)employment, and per capita income. Political economists now draw

upon advanced analytics to explicate a number of politico-market dynamics, from the economics of plutocracy to the effects of cronyism; from demographic and social economics to how policy affects economic behavior among national constituents. Many self-described political economists of the contemporary academy utilize mathematical models (e.g. John von Neumann's game theory) and "big data" representing market activity and population health to analyze or predict patterns of income or wealth distribution, assess modes of accumulation, or to forecast everything from rents to gross domestic product. Suffice it to say, political economy has been and continues to be broad in its scope and definition, in its object(s) of analysis and the tools by which those objects are analyzed. More concretely and to the point, though, political economy is perhaps as topical—nay, critical—as ever before.

Contributors to this special issue of the *Journal of Amateur Sport* have been charged with exploring political economy's breadth and heuristic potential—toward assembling a more complex reading of the civic, transactional, and commercial aspects of contemporary amateur athletics. This special issue is important, we believe, as the political economic dimensions of industrialized sport tend to be implied or overlooked in most sport business research - namely that in the interrelated fields of sport management, sport marketing, sport for development, and to some extent even sport economics. Indeed, it is quite rare to

find sponsorship, sales, or marketing scholars of sport delving into how the congruence of liberal democracy and supply-side economic *praxes* influence the act of consumption; or, to discovery in the literature deep explication on the social characteristics of the sport-based commodity-form; or, to run across a study proffering an analysis on the valorization of surplus athletic labor (to name but a few examples). Yet, these and many other features of the ongoing and multifarious political economy project are critical in framing how we buy, produce, sell, capitalize upon, and find ourselves alienated from or exploited by commercial sport. Equally important, perhaps more so, are the banal assumptions scholars often make about sport's givenness to commercialization and commodification. That is, why is it that sporting activities and the consumers and athletes involved in those activities are assumedly seeking to exchange or produce value? Is sport only always commercial? For some, yes. And for others, no.

Quite simply, there is much ground still yet to be covered in the political economic analysis of sport. In this forum, we seek to open some new doors (and some old ones), and to cover some of this ground by turning the contributors' collective gaze upon amateur sport and the athletes who play it. The common endeavor shared by each contribution to this special issue (from an admixture of perspectives) is the pursuit of new linkages between sport-based practice,

performance, object, or action and the broader political economic forces operating upon those sporting locals. As you will see, we cover quite a bit of ground, canvassing community-level sport to school based sport to intercollegiate athletics. The contributors carefully link broader systems of accumulation and governance to problems ranging from inequality of access to sport, disparities in sport-based human capital, the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics, and other important and timely topics. Our authors engage a cacophony of interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. economics, social geography, political philosophy, neoclassical [family] economics, and political ecology) and utilize a broad range of techniques (e.g. geographic information systems, meta-theory, surveys, and interviews) in their efforts to problematize both amateur sport/athletics and its effects.

Before outlining the remainder of the special issue's contents, we thought it might be a good idea to set the stage, so to speak. To do this, we outline some key points of contradiction that frame our dissonant collection. We do so not to suggest that this lack of consistency in political economic thought in general, or our analyses of sport in particular, are compromised by a lack of consensus, but rather to highlight how something as complex as amateur sport needs multiple perspectives and fluid approximations if we are to get somewhere better in our understanding of the

intersectional politics and economies of contemporary sport.

Political Economy of/as Contradiction

Since its earliest days, political economy has been burdened by contradiction. A brief survey of some of the field's key terms reveals political economy's oxymoronic tendencies. Controlled growth. Creative destruction. Labor power. Market states. Free trade. These and other key constructs by virtue of their very conjunction bring to *praxis* contradictions. Take, for instance, controlling growth: in an age of entrepreneurialism such as that which we currently find ourselves living in, how does the state or even the CEO plan for and moderate growth? How can those in charge of a geopolitical entity or transnational corporation predict market activity, regulate accumulation, or maintain a steady-state of increased returns given the unpredictable nature of innovation (arguably the key features of growth)? Or take Schumpeter's notion of creative destruction, whereby accumulation in capitalist economies (the delta function of capital) presupposes the annihilation of both wealth and property. How can we be making and selling stuff, building wealth through exchange, only to produce destruction? These and other political economic concepts reveal the complexity that comes with seeking to examine governed *potenxa* (potency) and freedom. By virtue of innumerable axes of association by which a given political economic order is established (e.g. labor and

capital, the public and the private, the one and the many, freedom and government), the questions of political economy are always already burdened by internal incongruities. When scholars set out to theoretically or empirically advance our understanding of how money converts into commodities, or how assets are given value in an exchange market and yet held privately, or understand the moment at which work in assigned value, things tend to get messy.

Of course, most branches of the social sciences are replete with contradictions; most are messy. However, political economy presents for the scholar an interesting series of contradictory relations. For our purposes—those being the analysis of the political and economic intersectionalities of and upon the athletic body in non-professional and pseudo-non-professional contexts—we would like to briefly outline a few such contradictions and discuss how they shape and give life to our agonistic project. We seek not to provide answers to the quandaries that sport introduces to the contemporary political economist, but rather to open new doors to the messy metaphysical terrain we now find ourselves seeking to traverse. We start by calling into question how our field tends to render those who are to be governed, and then turn to questioning how we make sense of that which is to be exchanged.

The (Sporting) Individual

First consider the individual athlete. Here we have the agent of human action (in von Mises terms), a rational (if bounded) actor who has come into being (as athlete) through a series of choices—to use the body to play, to train, to give oneself and one's time over to the craft or to the team, and so on. This individual, from the neoclassical perspective, will have over time accumulated the physical or human capital necessary to capitalize upon her investment. Yet she has little to no control over the labor market she places her athletic body and her labor power within; no ability to shape demand nor to structure the cultural politics or externalities that might add value to or diminish the value of her labor. As such, the individual athlete is subjugated to collective configurations—to society and/or to the market. But what are these collective configurations if not amalgamations of human action? Further still, ontologically speaking, how does any rational action—say the choice to pick up a basketball instead of a football—come into being without society, without the meanings, values, and significance swirling about the social world and associated with a given choice, action, or experience? Without the representation of the object, the leather sphere itself, or the socio-cultural significance placed upon each over time, there is no choice to be made.

All this leads to the question of determinism. The structural Marxists among us will likely point to base-superstructure forces to explain much of this. They will explain how systems of athletic labor and

the mode of (social) production produces the habitus fields upon which the individual makes choices, usually determining life chances and stratifying the opportunities of the individual athlete. The methodological individualists, by contrast, would inevitably point out the fact that humans are never identical in their taste, practices, or preferences—we are a productive engine of multiplicity. As such, the uptake of basketball represents an act of individual free will.

What is at stake here? If we as scholars of sporting praxis assume that the individual basketball player *becomes* a basketball player through choices, absent much consideration of the constraints and boundaries that might be acting upon rational action, then we might look to individualize our approach to promoting sport participation. We would then look into the psyche of the individual to mark out patterns of disposition, preference, or attitude that are predisposed to be managed, marketed to, coached, or developed. Conversely, if we take a structuralist approach to understanding the basketball player in question, we might instead look to the extent to which capitalism (and its ancillary labor and social class politics), the state, has actively repressed the individual or limited her ability to pursue sporting/social activities outside of basketball. We would look at the uneven distribution of power in establishing the systems by which the individual chooses what to play, where to play, and/or if play is even an option.

The (Sporting) Masses

Further still, continental political philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze or Roberto Esposito might look at something like mass sport—both mass participation sport and mass spectator sport—and find in the articulations of *the one* and *the many* a series of unexpected political economic relationships under-theorized in the sport research. In the extensive research on “identity” emanating from the sport marketing sub-discipline, for example, there is a noticeable gap in how we might best conceptualize the political and economic conditions upon which the individual forges his sporting identity. Is it merely the case that identity is something one builds, buys, or connects with? Does identity come by way of purchase (of a jersey representation a team with which one affiliates) or signification (waving a national flag, adorning the Nike swoosh)? Or is identity performed in rhythm with the social outputs of the biological masses? Is identity always contingent on social location, social constructedness of the author and the reader of its discursive projection? Can identities and the formation thereof be managed? The point here being: how can we as scholars chart a political economy of sport-based identities? What role does the nation-state play in forging the conditions of identity formation (and identification)? Does identity come to us and work through us in markets (and only in markets)? Are they inscribed onto our athletic or athlete-

consuming bodies? Is identity a matter of population? If so, could the political economies of Georges Bataille or Paolo Virno provide new insights? All this is left largely unstated in the sport marketing literature.

Also left under-theorized in the sport management literatures are the complex interrelationships that come with bringing sport participants or consumers together in common spaces. While it is clear that once congregated—as participants in Kim Il-sung Square in Pyongyang or as consumer-spectators in Neyland Stadium in Tennessee—the sporting masses produce cultural experiences, commercial activity, and surplus value, what is less clear is how such spatial and corporeal organization(s) of the masses serves particular political economic interests and ends. Moreover, in connecting the politics of identity and the politics of spatial distribution, to what extent is a member of a given sport community indebted to the membership at large (or to the intermediaries who brought the community into being)? If the intercollegiate athletics supporter highly identifies with the university—to the point where she sees herself in and as part of the institution—then to what does she owe the public (that is served by the university)? The state (that authorized and supports the university)?

The Market and the State

In this issue, contributors also look to more established approaches to exploring

sport's capacity for promoting individual freedom, institutional structures, and the twin arcs of accumulation and governance. Such established approaches have tended to look at sport market's unique qualities—from the supply and demand of athletic labor and sport-based merchandise to the exceptional post-Sherman Act cartel structure to intercollegiate and franchise sport organizations' extraordinary monopsony positions in acquiring labor and fixed capital (stadia). Sport has an unparalleled place in industrial economic history for its intermediaries' ability to avoid state regulation and in many cases juridical process. However, sport is also one of the most regulation-intensive sectors of the global economy. Its games are foisted upon volumes of codes and rules—from the play on the field to the administration of the events to the governance over commercial activity in and around the stadium. Its workforce is subject to intensive surveillance, biological, chemical, and gender testing, and intensified training regiments. Its salary structures are artificial and closed. In this sense, there is nothing free about the sport market. Indeed, the contradictory (and inseparable) articulation of politics and economics lies at the core of contemporary athletics. Here we have the sporting body—running, jumping, and moving as it does—being simultaneously pushed and pulled by state and market. It is a body that is constrained by training, technology, ideology, and polity just as it is set free through ludic motility.

Amateur Athletics as Contradiction

Since we are concerning ourselves with contradictions, it might now make sense to turn our attention to the focus of this special issue: amateurism. Concerned by the rise of professionalism in sport, and in an attempt to protect the sanctity of amateurism, the famous author and early bicycling aficionado G. Lacy Hillier proclaimed in 1892, “Sport is amusement solely...The essence of sport is relaxation...The sportsman (sic), then, is the man who has an amusement which may cost him something, but which must not bring him in anything, for an amusement which brings him in anything is not a sport but a business” (as cited in Allison, 2001, p. vii). In the historical present, however, it has become quite clear that sport is now a deeply privatized and commercialized feature of most societies.

Considering the widespread development of both mass participant and mass spectator sport over the course of the last 150 years, historians, sociologists, economists, legal scholars, and behavioral scientists have in recent decades dedicated considerable effort to the study of how political forces and economic logics have infiltrated, and in some ways been remediated by, the function of amateurism within sport.

This coupling of sport and business has impacted the structure of amateur sport organizations as well as the ethic of amateurism more generally. Issues such as

a) the professionalization of the Olympic Games, b) the rights of intercollegiate student-athletes to gain remuneration through their economically-productive sporting practices, and c) the hyper-commodification of youth sports feature largely in many a nations’ public discourse. It has been argued that amateurism serves a double function: on the supply side, amateurism produces a system of governance that suppresses wage labor (in relation to market value) and exacerbates income inequality (allowing those with capital to produce incomes at rates that exceed those producing income through labor); and on the demand side, the structure of amateur sport allows for the uneven allocation of public resources dedicated to fostering community development and health through sport and physical activity.

The Special Issue: Surfaces, Bodies, Institutions, and Markets

Given the current environment, there is a need for scholarly research and discussion on the political economy of amateur sport in the contemporary (global) market society. In what remains of this issue, we seek to get closer to answering questions that have longed haunted the sport studies disciplines, questions such as:

- Is the athlete a laborer or a commodity?
- Is the athlete a free or rational actor?
- Is it more beneficial for the state or the private sector to act as the primary provider of sport and recreation?

Are historically marginalized groups (based on race, gender, ability, sexuality, or socio-economic status)

Does commercial sport exacerbate, or alleviate, income inequality?

Does the reallocation of public resources to catalyze private sector sport lead to positive economic development?

In this issue our contributors canvass multiple sites and scales of amateurism to further problematize the political economics of the contemporary sporting condition. Given the breadth of the topic at hand, it is not surprising to note that there are a number of different approaches taken by the authors in this special issue. However, the general tenor of each ranges from community level analyses to K-12 school based inquiry to college athletics. Thus, we organized the articles from the larger perspective of community sports first, then move on to the still broad but more focused, before ending with four articles focusing on college athletics.

In the first two articles, Lee (“Economic and Strategic Management View toward Understanding Outsourcing in Amateur Sport”) and Kim, Coutts, Newman, Brandon-Lai, and Kim (“Social Geographies at Play: Mapping the Spatial Politics of Community-Based Youth Sport Participation”) focus on the political economic framings of sport at the community level. Lee’s work focuses on understand the outsourcing of youth sport programs by city-owned recreation centers.

Specifically, he analyzes three different sites in order to examine the motivation of outsourcing and what risks are involved with outsourcing youth sport programs. In so doing, he sheds light on a business and sport industry-wide tactic that has seemingly infiltrated youth sport programming with real practical and theoretical implications.

Kim and colleagues’ article complements Lee’s utilization of youth sport programs by mapping travel access to youth sport programs along lines of historical socio-economic and racial segregation and examined participants travel distances. Utilizing archival data from the Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Affairs Department in a mid-sized Southeastern United States city, Kim et al. offer an assessment of five years worth of demographic and GIS visualization data to show differences in travel and accessibility to sport programs among different racial and socio-economic demographics. These two articles offer an introduction to how the structures of amateur sport act upon, through, and within dynamics of sport participation from a city-wide standpoint.

While Kim and colleagues offer a nice example of the impact that systemic structure holds on accessibility of youth sport programs, Jones, Bunds, Carlton, Edwards, and Bocarro (“The Saliency of Sport in Cross-Race Friendship Selection”) move the special issue toward a school based examination. In their analysis on the impact of sport in cross-race friendships, Jones and colleagues seek to understand the

impact participating in sport has on one's friendships with individuals of a different race. Sport programs claim to offer an opportunity for individuals in different races and from different backgrounds to be exposed to different cultures, yet Jones et al. suggest this is only the case in certain situations.

Equal access to sporting opportunities is a central underlying issue in the first three articles of the special issue and is the main thrust behind Buchanan, Odenheimer, and Prewitt-White's examination of equal access to sporting opportunities in United States public schools ("An Examination of Equal Access in Athletic Programs Throughout Public High Schools in the United States"). Specifically, Buchanan and colleagues note that most opportunities for individuals in public schools are for those who compete in highly competitive sport activities. The authors appropriately question how the focus on highly competitive sports impacts opportunities for participation, especially when considering equal access across genders.

All of the first four articles comprising the first two sections on 1. Community sport and 2. Public school sport, examine the possibility that sport has not been carefully scrutinized in terms of its formation and function. That is, the structures in place have been exclusive in parts, and examinations of structures and the impact of structures on individual choice, freedoms, and action have been incomplete at best. Fort ("College Athletics

Spending: Principals and Agents v. Arms Race") leads us into our third and final section detailing the political economics of amateurism in college athletics by articulating that previous studies examining athletic department spending by utilizing the arms race explanation have been incomplete at best and naïve at worst. Fort, therefore, utilizes a bevy of research to suggest that researchers should instead use a principal-agent explanation that depends on actual observed budgetary data to examine college athletics expenditure patterns.

The profoundly grounded insights of Fort and his focus on athletic administrators and budgets lend way to the theoretical musings of Otto ("Ideological Perspectives on 'Athlete-Centered' Reform) who considers the role of the student-athlete in the financially driven big market of college athletics. Otto deeply interrogates the classical political philosophers in questioning how the likes of Marx and Engels, John Locke, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mills, and John Rawls can inform college athlete driven reform. In an era where the individual freedoms and liberties of athletes are questions and brought to the forefront through events such as the attempted unionization of student-athletes at Northwestern University, this timely article helps to theoretically frame the arguments of the current-era.

Building upon Otto's deeply theoretical submission, Marsh, Peterson, and Osborn ("Sport Discontinuation: A Comparison of Stated Goals to Actual Outcomes") bring

both the financial aspects and reform to the forefront through examination of college athletics programs that had cut at least one sport from their athletic department sport offering. The authors found that athletics departments offered three main reasons for cutting programs, reducing athletic spending, reallocating resources, and Title IX compliance. However, the authors found that the explained reasons for discontinuing a sport do not always fit with the actual processes and outcomes of sport elimination.

Finally, Horner, Ternes, and McLeod (“Not Going Pro: On Seeking Lasting Returns from College Sports”) build rather serendipitously upon the previous articles by offering an empirical examination into the lived experiences of graduated, former collegiate student-athletes in order to understand perceived “returns” athletes received through their student-athlete “investments.” This article very articulately utilizes Becker’s discussion of human capital to examine athlete experience and places the athlete within the expanding neoliberal university understanding between students and student-athlete as consumers.

In this era of uncertainty for amateur athletics through cuts in public spending on athletic opportunity and privatization of amateur sport, these eight articles offer crucial insight into the workings of amateur athletics across a number of paradigmatic approaches and levels of amateurism. It is our hope that the readership will be exposed to a diverse array of understandings of

amateur athletics and become invested contributors to ensuring a just structure for equal access and critical analysis of amateur sport writ large.

References

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