



CREaTE

Canterbury Research and Theses Environment

Canterbury Christ Church University's repository of research outputs

<http://create.canterbury.ac.uk>

Please cite this publication as follows:

Wellard, I. (2015) Embodied sporting friendships. Embodied Thoughts of the Month, 1. pp. 16-18.

Link to official URL (if available):

This version is made available in accordance with publishers' policies. All material made available by CReaTE is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

Contact: create.library@canterbury.ac.uk



Embodied thought of the month (ETM) – May 2015

Embodied sporting friendships



A few days before we broke up for the Christmas holidays, I had to go to Bournemouth to examine a PhD thesis. I had travelled down the night before and stayed in a hotel near the sea front. In the morning, after breakfast, before I had to set off for the viva, I walked down to the beach to take in some air. It was an overcast morning, but the air was crisp and fresh. It could hardly have been more than a few degrees and I was wrapped up like someone about to set off for the North Pole. As I walked down to the pier I noticed some surfers out in the water and on closer inspection observed that they were in two groups on either side of the pier. I presumed that the pier acted as some form of wave maker. The sea wasn't really that rough, in fact it was pretty still but the area around the pier was occasionally producing reasonable sized waves that could produce some moderate surfing. The group of surfers appeared to be acting as a small community. I couldn't see any solo surfers or others on their own further in the distance. What I did see was a group of surfers sharing the experience of this freezing cold December morning with others. I think I was more fascinated by my initial embodied reaction which was influenced by a physical sense that going into the sea must have felt really cold. Added to this was a recognition of the specific time of the year with Christmas only a few days away and my awareness that I was wrapped up to the nines while these surfers were in the water and attempting to enjoy the experience of riding the waves. But there was more to it than just about surfers enduring the cold waters and the specific activity of riding the waves. As I watched further, it was clear that because the waves were not that strong or frequent there appeared to be greater periods of time spent sitting on the surfboard waiting for the next wave. But this aspect seemed to be an equally important part of their activity as it was during those times the

surfers were chatting with each other and laughing and joking. Although I couldn't hear their conversations I assumed that this was an important part of the whole surfing experience because otherwise they would have been surfing alone.

The notion of the broader aspects, or the 'whole package', of taking part in a sporting activity is important. In her chapter on surfing friendships, Georgina Roy talks about the camaraderie and the companionship that is an integral element of surfing. In her research spent participating with women surfers in the UK, Georgina elaborates upon the additional elements which contribute to the whole surfing experience which, ultimately, drew the women together. It was interesting that what might be considered extreme aspects of the sport, such as surfing in the winter months in the bitter cold, were part of a bonding ritual and shared experience that consolidated the women's friendships and created a sense of unity and shared identity. Consequently, being able to talk about and share those experiences (of being cold and embracing the elements), not only while surfing, but in the pub afterwards, created deep and meaningful ties. Although this idea is not altogether new, much of it has been generated in writing about male bonding within the context of sport. However, in this case, Georgina demonstrates how these were just as important for the women surfers.

That the extreme conditions could be an enjoyable aspect of the surfing experience not only can be seen as significant in terms of the shared experiences that the surfers have but they are also indicative of a particular cultural knowledge relating to the peculiarities of the British weather. In contrast to the stereotypical image of the sun-kissed surfer riding the waves in Hawaii or Australia, the surfers that I saw on a cold December morning in Bournemouth were united because of their shared understanding of facing the British seasonal elements.

As I walked back to the hotel, I passed two men who were just putting their surfboards into a parked van. It was about 8.30am and I wondered where they were going now. Whether they were off to work or whether they were going home to have a nap. Either way, I admired their endurance and judging by their glowing faces I thought how it must have been a really invigorating way to start the day. Although, I'm not entirely sure that my cold phobic body would have responded to that challenge and I also don't know how fair it would have been on the PhD student that I was about to examine had I followed riding waves with a viva.

Notes:

1. Georgina Roy's discussion on her research with women surfers in the UK can be found in her chapter in the forthcoming book on *Researching Embodied Sport: exploring movement cultures* to be published by Routledge later in September.
2. Ian Wellard talks about the idea of the 'whole package' of sport in his book, *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment: an embodied approach* which was published in 2013 by Routledge.