

## The Transatlantic Migration of Sporting Labour, 1920-1939

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### Abstract:

*The mobility of sportsmen and women, like that of professional entertainers, is a neglected but important theme in social and cultural history. Focusing on the transatlantic migration stream between the United States and Britain, and on three sporting case studies (association football, boxing and speedway racing), this article demonstrates that patterns of sporting migration were rooted in wider migration systems and that regulatory responses were embedded in the broader policies of governments, governing bodies and trade unions. Like many other migrant workers, athletes faced considerable restrictions between the wars. Yet in the context of the increasing internationalization of sporting competition, and an emerging interconnection between national sporting cultures, interwar sport also offered new and unprecedented opportunities for mobility and for the construction of transnational sporting stars. Drawing on a range of archival sources, this article provides a fresh perspective both on the character of international migration and the tensions between transnational and national identities between the wars.*

Migration history over the last few decades has concentrated on the systems and networks within which population mobility took place and which linked together particular places of origin and destination. Increasingly, attention has been paid to understanding the impact of migration in both the home and host societies, and the various connections spanning the two.<sup>1</sup> The notion of transnational migration has been particularly useful in making sense of the myriad and multi-layered experiences of migrants and the continued role of the new and old 'home' in their lives.<sup>2</sup> A number of important studies of transatlantic migration from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance, have emphasized the importance of transnational connections before, during and after the voyage, carefully undermining the assumption that early twenty-first-century developments were particularly new.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC, 2002); Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1850*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Bloomington, IN, 2003), 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Blanc-Szanton (eds), *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New Haven, CT, 2000); Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London, 2000); Ioanna Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism between Greece and America* (Chicago, IL 2004); Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Bloomington, IN, 2003), 7-8. See also Neville Kirk, Donald M. MacRaild and Melanie Nolan,

Cultural migrations, although tiny in absolute numbers, are an important and yet under-studied element of a field which too often focuses on economic and societal change. Studying sporting migrants, like many other migrants in the fields of culture and entertainment, offers an insight into both changing scales and locations of leisure pursuits and into the larger question of how far, and how often, people could move in the early stages of mass globalization. Like musicians, actors, circus performers and other popular entertainers, sports labourers constituted a mobile workforce, often touring for short and longer periods or travelling to take part in specific performances. In some cases, they could be defined as ‘migrants’ rather than simply ‘movers’ in the sense that they moved residence, although seasonal patterns of mobility and the frequency of return migration makes precise distinctions difficult.<sup>4</sup> They were also particularly visible and prominent in the towns, cities and nations in which they performed. Theirs was a public form of work that could impact upon local performers as well as audiences. In the same way that other forms of popular entertainment could ‘influence...spectators’ notions of foreign worlds’,<sup>5</sup> it is possible that attitudes to foreign sportsmen and women may have reproduced, crystallised or even contributed to popular perceptions of ‘outsiders’ and alien workers more generally.

Historians have been surprisingly reluctant to examine the mobility of entertainment workers or the role of popular entertainment in the history of global interconnections and intercultural transfer. Studies of music, theatre and sport which take national traditions and identities as their point of departure have rarely taken full account of international dimensions or considered the movement of workers in these mobile occupations as a form of labour migration. There has, however, been the beginning of a turn towards transnational perspectives on entertainment history in recent years. Marline Otte, for instance, has highlighted the mobility and interdependence of labour as a key characteristic of the relationship between national entertainment industries from the late nineteenth-century to the 1930s. She argues that ‘a fairly constant stream of American and European performers and directors criss-crossed the Atlantic, leaving their imprints on the theatrical and musical

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‘Introduction: Transnational Ideas, Activities, and Organizations in Labour History 1860s to 1920s’, *Labour History Review*, 74 (2009), 221-32.

<sup>4</sup> See Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* (Basingstoke, 2008), 10, 302.

<sup>5</sup> Marline Otte, *Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, 2006), 6.

worlds of their host societies'.<sup>6</sup> Music has been regarded as an especially illuminating case study for exploring the globalization of cultural forms, with a number of articles examining the mobility of professional musicians and the accompanying potential for artistic transfers and exchanges.<sup>7</sup> Circus historians have likewise become attuned to discussing the international dimensions of the business, the transatlantic movement of labour and the role of foreign performers and overseas companies in the development of performance cultures.<sup>8</sup>

International and transnational perspectives are also becoming more prominent in relation to sport. A handful of recent studies have examined the expansion of international sporting contacts during the first half of the twentieth century and the construction of what one historian termed an 'imagined world' of international sport.<sup>9</sup> Crucial to this was the way in which sport could operate as a mediator between national and international identities, with nationalist rivalry developing alongside, and reinforcing, the international scope of sport.<sup>10</sup> While the existing literature has focused on the emerging power of international sports

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<sup>6</sup> Otte, *Jewish Identities*, 18. See also Gerben Bekker, *Entertainment Industrialised: The Emergence of the International Film Industry, 1890-1940* (Cambridge, 2008), 260; Graham Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922-1931* (Detroit, MI, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> See John Joyce, 'The Globalization of Music: Expanding Spheres of Influence', in Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens (eds), *Conceptualizing Global History* (Boulder, CO, 1993), 205-24; F. Anne M.R. Jarvis, 'German Musicians in London, c.1750-c.1850', in Stefan Manz, Margrit Schultze Beerbühl and John R. Davis (eds), *Migration and Transfer from Germany to Britain, 1660-1914* (Munich, 2007), 37-48; Angèle David-Guillou, 'Early Musicians' Unions in Britain, France and the United States: On the possibilities and impossibilities of transnational militant transfers in an international industry', *Labour History Review*, 74 (2009), 288-304; Bruce Johnson, 'The Jazz Diaspora', in Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz* (Cambridge, 2002), 35-54; Steven Banfield, 'Towards a History of Music in the British Empire: Three Export Studies', in Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne, 2007), 63-89; Garry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford, 1997), 144-67; Ian Woodfield, *Music of the Raj: A Social and Economic History of Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Society* (Oxford, 2000), 49-75.

<sup>8</sup> Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 194-9; Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester, 2000), 15-26; Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c. 1780-1880* (London, 1980), 174-5.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s*, (Cambridge, MA, 2006) 1-16.

<sup>10</sup> Keys, *Globalizing Sport*. See also Maarten Van Bottenburg, *Global Games* (Urbana, IL, 2001); idem, 'Beyond Diffusion: Sport and Its Remaking in Cross-Cultural Contexts', *Journal of Sport History*, 37 (2010), 41-53; Mark Dyreson, 'Globalizing the Nation-Making Process: Modern Sport in World History', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 20 (2003), 91-106.

organisations, and their associated international competitions, however, little attention has been paid to the myriad of less formal, but arguably more important, networks that also emerged in this period linking together administrators, promoters, the athletes themselves, and their sporting publics. The mobility and migration of athletes as performers and workers was central to these developments.

An analysis of the movement of sporting labour offers a fresh perspective on the wider chronology and character of international migration in the first half of the twentieth century. The earliest restrictions on immigration in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia were based on racial categories, effectively drawing what has been described as a 'global colour line' and establishing a 'transnational community of whiteness' across the Anglophone world.<sup>11</sup> The First World War marked a major turning point, with the imposition of a broader range of state restrictions on the free movement of labour, or what Aristide Zolberg has called 'a global network of barriers'.<sup>12</sup> These continued through the interwar years, with economic stagnation and depression additionally squeezing the demand for foreign workers and leading to an overall reduction in international labour migration. Transatlantic migration, however, was not stopped altogether. In fact, the so-called 'restrictive turn' in immigration policy occurred at precisely the time when sporting

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<sup>11</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008); Daniel Whittall, Review of Lake, Marilyn; Reynolds, Henry, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. H-HistGeog, H-Net Reviews. June, 2009. URL: <http://h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24838>

<sup>12</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg, 'Global Movements, Global Walls: Responses to Migration, 1885-1925', in Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Global History and Migrations* (Oxford, 1997), 279-307, 303. See also Carl Strikweda, 'Tides of Migration, Currents of History: The State, Economy, and the Transatlantic Movement of Labor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999), 367-94; James Foreman-Peck, 'Insiders and Outsiders: The Political Economy of International Migration during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Camille Guerin-Gonzales and Carl Strikweda (eds), *The Politics of Immigrant Workers: Labor Activism and Migration in the World Economy since 1830* (New York, 1993), 297-321, 316; Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke, 1998), 62-4; Moch, *Moving Europeans*, p. 161. For more nuanced explanations of the chronology of migration control, see Leo Lucassen, 'The Great War and the Origins of Migration Control in Western Europe and the United States (1880-1920)', in Anita Böcker et al. (eds), *Regulation of Migration: International Experiences* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1998), 45-72; Christiane Reinecke, 'Governing Aliens in Times of Upheaval: Immigration Control and Modern State Practice in Early Twentieth-Century Britain, Compared with Prussia', *International Review of Social History*, 54 (2009), 39-65.

competition was becoming increasing international and transnational networks linking individuals, clubs and associations were expanding.<sup>13</sup> In sport as in other sectors of entertainment, governments had to decide how to deal with industries dependent to varying degrees on a mobile and multinational labour force. The measures constructed to control sporting migration may have been embedded in wider government policy but can only be understood by reference to specific circumstances in each sector and the particular configuration of relationships between government officials, employers and trade unions.

This article will focus on a case study of one particularly prominent transatlantic network – that linking the United Kingdom with the United States. Notwithstanding the importance of the mobility of amateurs, attention will be paid here to the more prevalent and widely discussed movement of professional athletes. The main examples are drawn from three popular and commercialized early twentieth-century spectator sports: association football, boxing and speedway racing. International competition and labour mobility were essential to the functioning of each sport, although the type, volume and patterns of migration varied from case to case. The first section of the article details the internationalization of sporting competition from the mid-nineteenth century and subsequent moves towards international regulation. The second examines the varying patterns of migration in the three chosen cases and the formal and informal networks that sustained and encouraged further migration. The third part pauses briefly to consider how far these particular migratory patterns and processes affected perceptions of footballers, boxers and speedway riders as transnational icons. The final section analyses how labour migration in sport was perceived and regulated, with a particular focus on Britain, by governments, sports governing bodies and trade unions. By comparing the context, patterns, processes and regulation of migration in sport, this article seeks to shed some light on the neglected role of entertainers as migrant workers. It also makes some tentative suggestions about the value of sport as a means of understanding wider attitudes and policies towards foreign labour and the relationship between national and transnational identities.

## **The International Sporting Arena**

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<sup>13</sup> Reinecke, 'Governing Aliens', 41.

As with many aspects of globalization, the movement of athletes across borders and continents was not a late twentieth century or even a post-Second World War development. Sporting labour had been incorporated into wider global networks and migratory flows since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Institutional and economic exchanges, as well as competitive links, were all instrumental in encouraging the mobility of European and North American sportsmen and women. In horse racing, the movement of jockeys across national borders followed on from the importation of horses bred abroad and the arrival of foreign owners.<sup>14</sup> Pedestrians (competitive walkers), pugilists and rowers made frequent trips across the Atlantic from the mid-nineteenth century, followed by the very best golfers and tennis players from the 1890s.<sup>15</sup> By the interwar years, improved transportation and communication links, as well as the development of international agreements, networks and competitions, had helped to increase transatlantic sporting traffic. Notwithstanding the insularity of its major commercial sports, notably baseball and gridiron football, American sporting culture was ‘deeply interconnected’ with its European equivalent between the wars.<sup>16</sup> Barbara Keys has shown how bodies such as the American Olympic Committee (AOC) and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States (AAU) facilitated an increasing scale and range of contacts between amateur athletes and coaches in America and abroad. By the 1930s, sports tours were commonplace and a number of US coaches occupied influential positions with foreign teams and athletes.<sup>17</sup> In cricket and ice hockey, European clubs regularly drew on imported talent from the Caribbean and Canada respectively.<sup>18</sup> Elite golfers and tennis players, meanwhile, were already established as ‘the nomads of the sports migration process’, regularly moving across national borders from tournament to tournament as part of a nascent global sports circuit.<sup>19</sup> In these as in other sports, transatlantic competition was well established by the 1930s. Golf’s Walker Cup, pitting British and American amateurs, was created in 1922, with the Ryder Cup for professional teams following five years later.

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<sup>14</sup> Mike Huggins, ‘The Proto-Globalisation of Horseracing, 1730-1900: Anglo-American Interconnections’, *Sport in History*, 29 (2009), 369-91; Wray Vamplew, ‘Sporting Innovation: The American Invasion of the British Turf and Links, 1895-1905’, *Sport History Review*, 35 (2004), 122-37.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (London, 2004), 242-4; Heiner Gillmeister, *Tennis: A Cultural History* (London, 1997), 213-8.

<sup>16</sup> Keys, *Globalizing Sport*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> Keys, *Globalizing Sport*, 71-7.

<sup>18</sup> Learie Constantine, *Cricket and I* (London, 1933); *Daily Express*, 27 September 1934, 7 September 1938; *Daily Mirror*, 21, 24, 28 September 1935, 26 August 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Maguire et al., *Sports Worlds: A Sociological Perspective* (Champaign, IL, 2002), 28.

American golfers such as Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones, and tennis stars such as Bill Tilden and Helen Wills were regular competitors in European competition, while the best European players also played in the major American competitions.<sup>20</sup> The Olympic Games was likewise well established by the early 1930s as a key space for transatlantic sporting mobility and cultural interchange.<sup>21</sup> Despite accusations of isolationism on both sides, a network of sporting exchanges connected Europe and North America.

International competition was a particular feature of the three sports under consideration in this article. Football's first World Cup may not have taken place until 1930 but intra- and intercontinental fixtures between national teams and club sides were already common. By 1934, the world governing body could record 73 official annual international fixtures (not including the matches at that year's World Cup in Italy) and the following year 106 international matches took place.<sup>22</sup> In Europe, an international network based around the cities of Budapest, Prague and Vienna gradually expanded to take in Yugoslav and Italian clubs. Regular tours by clubs such as Rapid Vienna and Sparta Prague helped to establish competitive links with emerging French, German, Swiss and Spanish teams. International tournaments such as the Mitropa Cup for clubs and the International Cup for national teams (both inaugurated in 1927) cemented these connections, while regular matches between teams from Marseilles and Barcelona, for example, or London and Paris, reinforced wider commercial and political links between the continent's major cities.<sup>23</sup> Transatlantic competition was less common but nonetheless well established. Despite the relative isolationism of the British football associations, representative sides from England, Scotland

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, James Coxwenelton, 'Past and Present Invasions of British Golf', *Golf Illustrated*, June 1921; Arthur S. Draper, 'British Golfers in America', *American Golfer*, 3 December 1921; Grantland Rice, 'Jones and Hagen in the British Open', *American Golfer*, June 1926; *Daily Mirror*, 23 June, 25 November 1933.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Dyreson, *Crafting Patriotism for Global Domination: America at the Olympic Games* (London, 2009); idem., 'Marketing National Identity: The Olympic Games of 1932 and American Culture', *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 4 (1995), 23-48.

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Lanfranchi et al., *100 Years of Football: The FIFA Centennial Book* (London, 2004), 74.

<sup>23</sup> Roman Horak and W. Maderthaner, 'A Culture of Urban Cosmopolitanism: Urdil and Sindelar as Viennese Coffee-House Heroes', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13 (1996), 150-2; Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, *Moving With the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers* (Oxford, 2001), 193-6; Matthias Marschik, 'Mitropa: Representations of "Central Europe" in Football', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 36 (2001), 7-23, 9-11. On London-Paris football relations, in particular the annual armistice day match between London's Arsenal FC and Racing Club de Paris, see *Daily Mirror*, 11 October, 7, 8 November 1933; Roy Peskett (ed.), *Tom Whittaker's Arsenal Story* (London, 1958), 88.

and Wales toured Canada and the United States on no less than six occasions between 1926 and 1939. Club sides from Austria, Czechoslovakia, England, Italy, Hungary and Scotland undertook similar tours, while North America teams ventured in the opposite direction.<sup>24</sup> And while some of the world's leading footballing nations (particularly the British) did not enter the first three World Cup tournaments in the 1930s, these were nonetheless genuinely international and transatlantic, if not yet global, gatherings.<sup>25</sup>

Boxing at the highest level had long been an international sport. We have already noted that the leading prizefighters of the nineteenth century regularly crossed the Atlantic in search of the highest purses. Encounters between North American and European fighters were facilitated by newspaper coverage and the transatlantic cooperation of journals such as the *Spirit of the Times* and *Bell's Life in London*. Famous bouts such as Tom Sayers and John Heenan's 1860 meeting in a Hampshire field were part of the collective memory of the sport in both countries.<sup>26</sup> This international dimension led one historian to describe prizefighting as 'the first world sport'.<sup>27</sup> The internationalization of boxing increased as the sport became formalized and regulated from the late nineteenth century. By the second decade of the twentieth century, foreign boxers, particularly Frenchmen, Australians and black Americans, were regular competitors in British boxing rings.<sup>28</sup> The absence of genuine local contenders meant that the most talented boxers in Europe, particularly, were forced to compete across national boundaries. By the mid-1920s, an informal touring circuit linked the main

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<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, 16 March, 31 August 1926, 20 July 1927, 23 December 1930; *Glasgow Herald*, 8, 29 May, 2, 29 June, 1 July 1939. Peter Beck, *Scoring for Britain: International Football and International Politics, 1900-1939* (London, 1999), 104-7.

<sup>25</sup> The 1930 tournament in Uruguay included four European nations (Belgium, France, Romania and Yugoslavia), two from North and Central America (Mexico and the USA) and seven from South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay). In Italy in 1934, there were twelve European nations (Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), one each from Africa (Egypt) and North America (USA) and Argentina and Brazil from South America. The 1938 tournament in France had the same twelve European representatives, with the exception of Norway and Poland replacing Austria and Spain, the Dutch East Indies from Asia, and Cuba and Brazil from Central and South America respectively.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, 30 April 1860; *The Times*, 18 April 1860. See also Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize-Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 148-57; Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London, 2008), 79-81.

<sup>27</sup> Dennis Brailsford, *Bareknuckles: A Social History of Prizefighting* (Cambridge, 1988), chapter 13.

<sup>28</sup> See Gary Shaw, "Ringside at the Graveyard: The Rise and Role of Boxing in Liverpool, 1900-1939", MA dissertation, De Montfort University, 2000, 35-9.



international boxing centres of New York, London, Paris and Berlin. The leading British trade newspaper, *Boxing*, published weekly columns on the sport's progress in France, Germany and the United States, and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic kept their readers regularly informed on international fights and leading contenders for championship belts.<sup>29</sup>

Speedway racing, meanwhile, was a sport built on international contact. It is generally regarded to have begun in Australia in 1923 although it had its origins much earlier in races organized in trotting stadia in America. The Australian version of the sport was soon exported to Britain (in 1928) and other parts of Europe and North and South America. By 1930, commercial speedway tracks had been built in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, France, Argentina, the United States, South Africa and New Zealand, alongside Australia and Britain.<sup>30</sup> The first professional riders in Britain were drawn from a mixture of national backgrounds and international contests were among the most popular competitions. 'Test' matches pitted England against Australia and, later, teams representing the USA and USA/Canada, while special meetings were arranged between British riders and overseas stars.<sup>31</sup> A riders' World Championship was also introduced in 1936. It incorporated entrants from eleven different nations in its initial qualifying rounds, with American, Australian, British and Danish riders represented in the first final at Wembley Stadium.<sup>32</sup>

Governing bodies were created with the intention of regulating international sporting contacts and competition. Some of these were more successful than others. Representatives of the French, Belgian, Swiss, Spanish, Danish, Swedish and Dutch national associations founded the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1904. Although it

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<sup>29</sup> See the 'Parisian News and Notes' and 'American Notes and News' columns in *Boxing*, 12 January 1920, 3 May 1922, 3 March 1929 and 5 June 1935. British and continental European boxers were featured regularly from the late 1920s on the cover of the leading American monthly boxing publication, *The Ring*. See, for example, *The Ring*, November 1929 (Phil Scott), March 1930 and February 1931 (Jack 'Kid' Berg), March 1936 (Jock McAvoy), April 1937 (Benny Lynch), January and February 1938 (Tommy Farr), and April 1938 (Jock McAvoy).

<sup>30</sup> *Speedway News*, 11 April 1930; Jack Williams, "'A Wild Orgy of Speed': Responses to Speedway in Britain Before the Second World War", *The Sports Historian*, 19 (1999), 1-15.

<sup>31</sup> Modern Records Centre (MRC), Warwick, ACU 660/1/1/6, Minutes of Auto-Cycle Union (ACU) Track Licensing Committee, 26 June 1930; Minutes of ACU Track Committee, 5 March 1931; *Speedway News*, 3 October 1930, 10, 24 July 1931, 17 July 1937, 7 May 1938.

<sup>32</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 2 April 1936; ACU Minute Books, ACU Speedway Championship of the World, Supplementary Regulations, undated.

faced some early crises, FIFA grew quickly to embrace 31 national associations in 1923 and 51 by 1938. By this point, it was the world's largest sporting federation, although significantly the four British associations remained outside its aegis for all but four years (1924-28) between the wars. One of FIFA's main responsibilities was the regulation of international player transfers. By the 1930s, players seeking to be registered by a different national association from their own were required to have clearance in the form of a transfer certificate from their 'home' association.<sup>33</sup>

The international regulation of professional boxing was slower to develop and more haphazard when it did. The main impetus came from the United States, which by the 1920s had taken the lead from Britain in the organization of international contests and title fights. The New York State Athletic Commission (NYSAC), founded in 1911, was the leading body in this respect, aided by the power of the world's most successful fight promoter, Tex Rickard. It has been described as 'professional boxing's first world governing body', with New York's Madison Square Garden the unofficial international headquarters of the sport.<sup>34</sup> The authority of the NYSAC was only ever partial, however, even in the USA, where other state boxing commissions exerted considerable autonomy and a rival National Boxing Association (NBA) was established in 1920. The British Boxing Board of Control (BBBC) signed agreements with the NYSAC and NBA in the 1920s for the reciprocal recognition of contracts and suspensions, as well as the arrangement of permits for boxers wishing to compete across the Atlantic.<sup>35</sup> But in practice disagreements persisted over the recognition of champions, challengers, contracts and rules and the NBA, BBBC, as well as the International Boxing Union (IBU) (based in Paris) retained considerable authority to sanction their own international contests and titles.<sup>36</sup>

Founded in 1904, the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclistes (FIM) was the international body responsible for speedway racing from the 1930s. It included ten affiliated

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<sup>33</sup> Lanfranchi et al., *100 Years of Football*, pp. 59-75; Alan Tomlinson, 'Going Global: The FIFA Story', in Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel (eds), *Off the Ball: The Football World Cup* (London, 1986), 83-98, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana, IL., 1990), 62-3; John Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (Manchester, 1996), 49.

<sup>35</sup> The National Archives: Public Record Office (TNA:PRO), Kew, HO45/18745, Annual Report of the British Boxing Board of Control, 1924; Copy of Agreement between New York State Athletic Commission and British Boxing Board of Control, undated; C. Donmall to M. Muggleston, 10 October 1929; *Sporting Life* (London), 7, 18 December 1929.

<sup>36</sup> See *Boxing, Racing and Football*, 25 September 1929; *Daily Mirror*, 17 October, 13 December 1934; *Sporting Chronicle*, 14 August 1935.

national associations in 1912, a figure which had risen to 30 by the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>37</sup> In practice, however, it was the British authorities of the sport, initially the Track Licensing Committee, and from 1933 the Speedway Control Board, under the auspices of the Auto-Cycle Union (ACU), which eventually took the lead in arranging and managing international competitions and tours, often with the aid of promoters and newspaper sponsorship.<sup>38</sup>

### **Patterns of Migration and Assistance Networks**

Sporting labour was intertwined with broader patterns of migration and sat within wider transnational and transcontinental migration systems. Douglas S. Massey et al.'s classic study of international migration theory argued that 'causal forces operating at a variety of levels lend a degree of permanence to international flows and over time lead to the emergence of stable migration systems'.<sup>39</sup> Clearly the United States and the United Kingdom were closely linked as part of a wider Atlantic system through which some 35 million Europeans migrated to North America between 1815 and 1939.<sup>40</sup> In common with most occupational groups, the movement of sports professionals was greatly facilitated by a host of informal social networks and more formal institutional networks.<sup>41</sup> Networks have been defined as 'the ties that bind migrants, previous migrants and non-migrants within and between the countries of

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Bamford, *Speedway: The Pre-War Years* (Stroud, 2003), 12; <<http://www.fim-live.com/en/fim/history>>, accessed 16 June 2009.

<sup>38</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/7, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 30 May, 26 July 1933, 4 January 1934; Williams, 'Responses to Speedway', 2-3, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas S. Massey et al., 'Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal', *Population and Development Review*, 19 (1993), 462.

<sup>40</sup> Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, 332.

<sup>41</sup> See Michael P. Hanagan, 'Labor History and the New Migration History: A Review Essay', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 5 (1998), 57-79; Enda Delaney and Donald M. MacRaild, 'Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities Since 1750: An Introduction', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23 (2005), 127-42; Ewa Morawska and Willfried Spohn, 'Moving Europeans in the Globalizing World: Contemporary Migrations in a Historical-Comparative Perspective', in Wang (ed.), *Global History*, 46-50.

origin and destination’, connecting ‘the social and individual reasons for migrating’.<sup>42</sup> At the formal level, the communications between governing bodies, administrators, employers, entrepreneurs and journalists mentioned in the previous section played an important part in facilitating the movement of sporting talent across the Atlantic. Major international sporting events, meetings and tournaments functioned as what David Blackburn has termed ‘zones of contact’ between these groups, encouraging the exchange of ideas and personnel.<sup>43</sup> Informal social networks based on personal communication (through letters, visits home and the like) between migrants and family and friends in the sending country were also important in initiating the prospect of migration in the first place and then in reinforcing and extending migration streams.<sup>44</sup>

In soccer, a handful of overlapping migration systems had emerged by the 1930s. The first of these was based around Britain and Ireland. At its core were the commercially successful Football League clubs in England, which drew talented employees from Irish, Scottish and Welsh clubs on the periphery. As many as 438 (22.5 per cent) of the Football League workforce in 1925 was non-English.<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere in Europe, the migration of players and coaches from central Europe to the nascent national leagues of western Europe, particularly France, represented a second important network. The French professional league was an amalgam of nationalities. Some 329 foreign professionals were employed in the top division between 1932 and 1939, with the non-French contingent accounting for 35 per cent of the entire workforce in the 1933-34 season. Players from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia were particularly well represented in this most cosmopolitan of

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Samers, *Migration* (London, 2010), 86. See also Massey et al., ‘Theories of International Migration’, p. 448; Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2010), 45-63.

<sup>43</sup> David Blackburn, “‘As dependent on each other as man and wife’: Cultural Contacts and Transfers’, in Dominik Geppert and Robert Gerwarth (eds), *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain: Essays on Cultural Affinity* (Oxford, 2008), 26. The ship served a similar function on transatlantic voyages as a space where friendships and acquaintances were made and reinforced, ideas were circulated and plans formulated for future international sporting contacts. See Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (Abingdon, 2006), 204; Ted Broadribb, *Fighting is my Life* (London, 1951), 86-7.

<sup>44</sup> Enda Delaney, “Transnationalism, Networks and Emigration in Post-War Ireland”, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23 (2005), 425-46.

<sup>45</sup> Calculated from data in *Athletic News*, 3, 10, 17, 24 August 1925.

leagues.<sup>46</sup> The third significant migratory network was transcontinental, with Argentinian, Brazilian and Uruguayan players moving to the clubs of southern France, Spain and Italy. Between 1929 and 1943, for example, 118 players from these three South American nations travelled to Italy to play in the top two divisions of the professional league. Most of these players were dual nationals of Italian descent and a number, such as Raimundo Orsi, Miguel Andreolo and Luis Monti, subsequently represented Italy in international competition.<sup>47</sup>

The migration of British footballers to North America was part of a further overlapping transatlantic system. The major pull for potential migrants was the emergence of the professional American Soccer League (ASL) in 1921. Founded by Thomas Cahill, a seasoned soccer administrator who had acted as secretary of the United States Football Association (USFA) from its creation in 1913, the ASL was based initially around eight established soccer centres in the northeast – Philadelphia, Pawtucket, Jersey City, Fall River, Harrison, Holyoke, Brooklyn and New York.<sup>48</sup> It drew its labour force mainly from a mixture of American players of European origin and imported footballers from Austria, Hungary, Sweden, Ireland, England and Scotland. The club owners were helped in acquiring overseas talent by the withdrawal of the British associations from FIFA between 1920 and 1924, a development which freed players to consider moving anywhere in the world where better conditions and contracts might be available. Scots were well represented from the start, especially at company teams such as J & P Coats, a Scottish-owned firm based in Pawtucket, Rhode Island and those of Holyoke and Fall River, Massachusetts, whose mills had well-established links with Scotland. Many of the players employed by these clubs were former professionals in Britain who had moved primarily to find industrial work rather than to play football.<sup>49</sup> When the ASL expanded from eight franchises to twelve in 1924, however, a number of the wealthy owners became more adventurous in their attempts to capture talented footballers from their British employers. Limited employment opportunities, poor pay and restrictive contracts and labour conditions were all important factors in convincing these

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<sup>46</sup> Pierre Lanfranchi, 'The Migration of Footballers: The Case of France, 1931-1982', in Bale and Maguire (eds), *Global Sports Arena*, 63-77, 68; Pierre Lanfranchi and Alfred Wahl, *Les footballeurs professionnels* (Paris, 1995), 79.

<sup>47</sup> Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, pp. 72-88; Paul Dietschy, 'Football Players' Migrations: A Political Stake', *Historical Social Research*, 31 (2006), 31-41, 33-4.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, 8 May, 25 December 1921, 26 May 1923. For Cahill and the pre-history of the ASL, see *Sporting Life* (Philadelphia), 27 November 1915, 3 February 1917.

<sup>49</sup> *Topical Times*, 10 May 1924.

players to move to America. For those like the Dunfermline defender Tom McMillan, the offer of £12 a week to play football and work in Boston was ‘too good to be missed’.<sup>50</sup>

**Table 1: National Origin of European Football Players in the American Soccer League, 1921-31**

<i>Season</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Austria</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Other</i>
1921/22	19	7	1	0	0	1	1
1922/23	30	9	1	0	0	0	1
1923/24	47	9	2	0	0	0	1
1924/25	63	12	6	0	0	7	3
1925/26	78	13	9	0	0	7	4
1926/27	82	17	9	5	6	3	4
1927/28	83	10	14	6	6	2	3
1928/29	80	14	6	6	2	4	3
1929/30	73	10	6	12	5	5	5
1930 (Fall)	52	6	4	8	2	2	6
1931 (Spring)	50	7	3	6	2	1	4
1931 (Fall)	34	7	3	5	3	2	5

*Source:* Compiled from data in Colin Jose, *American Soccer League, 1921-1931: The Golden Years of American Soccer* (Lanham, MD, 1998).

At its height in the mid-1920s, the ASL was dominated by imported British labour. During the 1926-27 season, eighty-two Scottish and seventeen English players (out of a total of around 330) were engaged by the ASL’s twelve franchises (see Table 1). Eleven of these arrived directly in the summer from clubs in the Football League, the oldest and most powerful professional competition in the world at the time.<sup>51</sup> In many respects, these migrations were an extension of the culture of labour transfer embedded in the regulations of British football. While the system allowed employers considerable scope to retain the services of favoured employees it also encouraged the growth of a significant transfer market in players. Most signed annual contracts and a considerable number changed employer on a

<sup>50</sup> *New York Times*, 1 July 1924; *Sunday Post* (Glasgow), 3 August 1924. One British newspaper reported in 1923 that a clever player could receive £20 a week in the USA, compared with a wage limit of £8 in the playing season in England. *Topical Times*, 19 May 1923.

<sup>51</sup> Drawn from data in Colin Jose, *American Soccer League: The Golden Years of American Soccer* (Lanham, MD, 1998).

regular basis, leading one observer to identify the 1920s as ‘the age of transfers’.<sup>52</sup> Between 1931-32 and 1935-36, an average of 318 footballers were transferred each season among Football League clubs, representing a little less than 20 per cent of the total workforce.<sup>53</sup> The extension of employment opportunities outside Britain was facilitated by the Association Football Players’ and Trainers’ Union (AFPTU), which set up its own employment bureau to help position unemployed players with prospective employers at home and abroad.<sup>54</sup> Social support networks developed as emigrant players wrote back with positive reports of their new lives and encouraged former colleagues to join them at their new clubs.<sup>55</sup> The former Scottish international Tom Muirhead was a particularly influential ‘agent’ for American soccer, persuading a stream of Scottish professionals to join him at the newly formed Boston Wonder Workers, where he became player-coach in the summer of 1924.<sup>56</sup> From the late 1920s, however, a number of factors contributed to the slowing of migration from Britain to the United States. A damaging internal dispute between the ASL and the USFA tarnished the status of American soccer and, in the context of the Wall Street Crash, undermined its financial security. Equally significant was the establishment in 1929 of a ‘working agreement’ between the FIFA-affiliated USFA and its non-FIFA British counterparts to respect each other’s registrations and suspensions.<sup>57</sup> By 1931, the ASL had collapsed and the transatlantic flow of football migrants was briefly reversed, as a handful of North American nationals joined British clubs. The most famous of these was Joe Kennaway, the Canadian-born goalkeeper with Fall River, who signed for Glasgow Celtic in the Scottish League in 1931, going on to represent the club for the rest of the decade, and his adopted country on one occasion in 1933.<sup>58</sup>

The dynamics of migration in boxing were rather different. Boxers travelled across the Atlantic in both directions, sometimes for specific fights and sometimes on extended tours

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<sup>52</sup> *Topical Times*, 21 April 1928.

<sup>53</sup> Professional Footballers’ Association (PFA), Manchester, File 35, Statistics required from the Football League in the case *Corbett v. Inland Revenue* and *Dale v. Inland Revenue*, 1939.

<sup>54</sup> PFA, Minutes of Association Football Players’ and Trainers’ Union (AFPTU), 20 August 1923 (AGM), 26 August 1929 (AGM), 22 August 1932 (AGM); 20 August 1934 (AGM).

<sup>55</sup> See the publication of letters from Willie Crilley, Alec McNab and Neil McBain, *Sunday Post* (Glasgow), 20 July, 31 August 1924, 27 June 1926.

<sup>56</sup> *Evening News* (Glasgow), 23 May 1924; *Sunday Post* (Glasgow), 6, 13 July, 24 August 1924; *Sports Pictures*, 27 December 1924.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, 5 January 1929.

<sup>58</sup> *New York Times*, 24 October 1931; *FA News*, April 1976.

arranged by promoters and managers. The supremacy of its boxers and the financial clout of its promoters meant that the United States became a magnet for the world's best boxers. Ambitious European fighters wishing to develop their skills and advance their careers tended to make their way to America sooner or later. In the lucrative heavyweight division, in particular, boxers such as Germany's Max Schmeling, Italy's Primo Carnera and Spain's Paulini Uzcudun spent considerable time in American rings.<sup>59</sup> Commenting on the perceived increase in 'transatlantic imports', *Boxing's* American correspondent suggested in March 1934 that 'before very long there'll be more foreign fighters performing than home products'.<sup>60</sup> But the migratory flow was not one-directional. American boxers of various abilities were a commonplace on boxing bills in European towns and cities. Although it was unlikely to enhance their championship reputations at home, considerable money could be made as a result of British and continental tours. Some boxers were particularly cosmopolitan, criss-crossing the globe and basing themselves outside their own countries for extended periods of time. The bantamweight Al Brown, for example, was born in Panama but moved to the United States at the age of twenty. In a professional career stretching from 1922 to 1942, he fought 134 times in fifteen different countries and on four continents. No less than seventy-two of these bouts took place in Europe. African-American heavyweight Obie Walker spent over two years in Europe during the mid-1930s, boxing in London, Bristol and Leicester as well as in Paris, Strasbourg, Brussels, Geneva and Montreux.<sup>61</sup> Jack 'Kid' Berg of Whitechapel, meanwhile, was one of a number of British boxers who split his working life between North America and Britain. He spent the peak of his professional career between 1928 and 1932, including a spell as junior welterweight world champion, living and fighting in the US, mainly in Chicago and New York.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See *Sunday Post* (Glasgow), 1 August 1926; *Sporting Chronicle*, 2 September 1935; *New York Times*, 29 August, 5 September 1928, 13 March 1929.

<sup>60</sup> *Boxing*, 28 March 1934.

<sup>61</sup> *Boxing*, 31 January 1934; *Daily Mirror*, 22 September 1934, 8 May, 22 July 1935. Brown and Walker's fight records drawn from <<http://www.boxrec.com/>>, accessed 29 August 2008.

<sup>62</sup> *New York Times*, 13, 27 July 1928; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 January 1930, 25 April 1931; *New York Herald Tribune*, 17 January 1930; *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 August 1930.



**Table 2: Permits issued for American Entertainers by the Ministry of Labour, 1934-36**

<i>Type of Employment</i>	<i>1934</i>	<i>1935</i>	<i>1936</i>
Legitimate Stage	124	95	139
Concert Vocalists	9	16	19
Concert Instrumentalists	28	40	38
Variety and Cabaret	559	625	718
Film Artists	12	36	60
Circus Artists	18	13	18
Boxers and Wrestlers	36	39	37
Miscellaneous	123	15	22
Total	909	879	1051

*Source:* TNA: PRO, LAB 8/72, Note on the admission of alien artistes and entertainers, Statement of applications made in 1934, 1935 and 1936 for permission to enable United States Actors, Artists and Entertainers to accept employment in the United Kingdom, 5 April 1937.

This interchange of boxing labour was encouraged by transnational connections and partnerships between managers, promoters and journalists. British promoters such as Rube Welch, C. B. Cochran and Harry Jacobs made considerable efforts during the 1920s to scout American boxers and arrange programmes matching home favourites against imported fighters.<sup>63</sup> Jeff Dickson, an America impresario based in Paris, was particularly cosmopolitan in his outlook. He promoted boxing in a number of European cities, including London, where over sixty fights were staged under his name between 1929 and 1936.<sup>64</sup> Dickson was particularly noted for importing American fighters to Europe and was credited with pioneering fights between leading foreign boxers, such as Carnera's bouts with the American 'Young' Stribling and the German Franz Diener at the Royal Albert Hall in 1929, thus creating 'a real enthusiasm for the foreign pugilist'.<sup>65</sup> Transcontinental cooperation was aided by the fact that foreign boxers were often required to engage licensed managers when competing abroad. European boxers, in particular, normally took on American managers and trainers for their cross-oceanic ventures. The English-born New Yorker Jimmy Johnston, for example, was Phil Scott's American manager, while Charlie Rose looked after his interests in

<sup>63</sup> *Boxing*, 27 October 1920; Sam Heppner, 'Cockie' (London, 1969), 128-31; John Harding, *Cochran* (London, 1988), 75-6; John Harding with Jack Berg, *Jack Kid Berg: The Whitechapel Windmill* (London, 1987), 82-3.

<sup>64</sup> *East London Sports and Entertainments Mirror*, 5 January 1935; Broadribb, *Fighting is my Life*, 51, 55.

<sup>65</sup> See *Sporting Life* (London), 19 November, 18 December 1929; *Daily Mirror*, 8 January 1935; *Sporting Chronicle*, 28 August 1935; *Daily Express*, 9 September 1938. The quotation is from *Boxing, Racing and Football*, 8 January 1930.

Europe. Similarly, Berg's first trip to the US in 1928 was prompted by an offer from Chicago managers Sol Gold and Frankie Jacobs, while Ray Arcel trained him throughout his time in America.<sup>66</sup> It is impossible to know with any precision how many boxers journeyed across the Atlantic each year. British journalists certainly reported periodic American 'invasions' of the UK throughout the period.<sup>67</sup> The limited statistical evidence we have reveals that an average of 37 American boxers and wrestlers were granted work permits each year between 1934 and 1936, although this was a small stream when compared with the migration of stage actors and variety artistes (Table 2).

Speedway was likewise linked across continents by an international circuit of competition. Quickly developing as a commercial sport, British speedway offered the greatest economic opportunities for international riders. *Speedway News* reported the arrival of 'a boat-load' of Australian riders every April but the nascent British leagues also included riders from the United States, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany and Denmark. 'No other sport', it was confidently asserted at the beginning of the 1930 season, 'includes men of so many nationalities competing throughout the season'.<sup>68</sup> Lasting from late March to early October, the British speedway season dovetailed with the competitive season in Australia, South Africa and South America. This allowed dozens of riders of all nationalities to ride professionally all year round. The best speedway riders thus practised a form of seasonal migration, sailing back and forth each year between the northern and southern hemispheres.<sup>69</sup> Transnational promoters such as the British-based Australian Johnnie Hoskins, and commercial combines like International Speedways and Dirt Track Speedways, with their multinational management and international troupes of riders, were particularly important in

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<sup>66</sup> *Boxing, Racing and Football*, 16 January, 13 February 1929; *New York Herald Tribune*, 25 February 1930; Charlie Rose, *Life's a Knock-Out* (London, 1953), 134; Harding with Berg, *Jack Kid Berg*, 84-5.

<sup>67</sup> See *Boxing*, 27 October 1920; *The Times*, 4 May 1937.

<sup>68</sup> *Speedway News*, 11 April 1930. The number of non-British riders was subject to considerable seasonal fluctuation. In 1932, National League clubs employed twenty-seven Australian riders, three New Zealanders, and one South African and American. By the following year, a shortage of Australian riders (reportedly only six permanently attached to League clubs) briefly jeopardized that season's Test Match series. The number of 'colonials' rose subsequently and was supplemented by an increase in American and Canadian imports, as well as touring foreign 'guests' who appeared on British tracks but were not contractually attached to British teams, from the mid-1930s. *Speedway News*, 16 September 1932; MRC, ACU 660/1/1/7, Minutes of Meeting of ACU Speedway Control Board and Speedway Promoters, 18 May 1933.

<sup>69</sup> See *Speedway News*, 10 October 1930, 17 April, 23 October 1931.

facilitating transcontinental migration.<sup>70</sup> From his London base, Hoskins, for instance, brought promising riders and foreign teams over to Britain but also arranged a series of commercial tours that took his star riders across the globe for months at a time.<sup>71</sup> Some of the early professional riders, such as the American Lloyd ‘Sprouts’ Elder, were particularly mobile as they worked freelance for appearance money rather than being contracted to specific teams. Elder stayed a number of seasons in Britain but spent most of his career on the move, appearing at speedway tracks in Australia, Europe and South America as well as his native California.<sup>72</sup> Another American, Ray Tauser, boasted in April 1932 of having ‘ridden on dirt tracks in four different countries of the world, including three different continents’ over the previous six months, while the Danish rider Morian Hansen considered himself ‘a man without a country’, having ‘travelled all over the world’ during the 1930s.<sup>73</sup>

### **Transatlantic ‘Commuters’ and Transnational ‘Stars’**

In sport as in other industries, some workers operated as ‘transatlantic “commuters”’ who migrated ‘back and forth several times during their lives’.<sup>74</sup> The centrality of international competition to the organization of boxing, speedway racing and soccer meant that many rank-and-file and ‘star’ athletes alike were ‘globetrotters’. Information from passenger lists and biographical accounts demonstrates that sportsmen and women were regular travellers to and from the United States. The transnational Berg sailed to New York from Southampton six times between 1929 and 1938, while the Manchester-based speedway rider Eric Langton made working visits to the United States as well as to Argentina/ Uruguay, Australia and

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<sup>70</sup> TNA: PRO, BT 31/30189/229859, Dirt Track Speedways, Register of Directors, 6 July 1928; Annual Return, 31 December 1929; Sprouts Elder, *The Romance of the Speedway* (London, 1930), 24.

<sup>71</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/7, Minutes of ACU Track Licensing Committee, 24 August 1928, 8 April 1929; Minutes of ACU Track Committee, 27 October 1932; John S. Hoskins, *Roarin’ Round the Speedway* (London, 1930), 72; Johnnie Hoskins, *We Do Have Fun* (London, 1938), 67-83.

<sup>72</sup> Elder, *Romance of the Speedway*; *Speedway News*, 2 April, 26 June 1931.

<sup>73</sup> *Speedway News*, 22 April 1932, 13 May 1939.

<sup>74</sup> Klaus J. Bade, ‘Conclusion: Migration Past and Present – The German Experience’, in Dirk Hoerder and Jörg Nagler (eds), *People in Transit: German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820-1930* (Cambridge, 1995), 399-412, 402.

New Zealand every winter from 1929 to 1935.<sup>75</sup> Few travelled alone: most were part of an entourage or stable of fighters, or a touring speedway or football party. Although it is impossible to come by comprehensive statistics regarding length of residence, it would appear that most sportsmen were temporary migrants rather than settlers. Certainly, in the majority of cases sporting emigrants eventually returned home. In this respect, they were part of the broader flow of return migration that has become the subject of considerable historiographical attention. Mark Wyman has estimated return rates from the United States to Europe at somewhere between a quarter and a third for the fifty years from 1880 until 1930.<sup>76</sup> By the early twentieth century, improvements in transport technology and the reduced costs of transatlantic travel meant that short-term and seasonal migration to the USA had become 'a stage in the life course for millions of Europeans who never intended to become more than sojourners'.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, migrant athletes were interesting examples of transnational workers who remained connected simultaneously to their home and host societies. Many assumed what Eric Richards has called 'a mentality of mobility', in which the prospect of moving on or returning home was ever-present.<sup>78</sup>

If many migrant athletes were transatlantic 'commuters', the best known could be regarded as transnational 'stars'. Nancy Foner's discussion of immigrants in early twentieth-century America who 'maintained extensive, and intensive, transnational ties and operated in what social scientists now call a transnational social field' bears comparison to the migration histories of many interwar sports labourers.<sup>79</sup> The speedway rider Jack Milne was a case in point. An American and Australian champion before arriving in Britain, Milne won speedway's World Riders' Championship ahead of fellow Americans Wilbur Lamoreaux and brother Cordy at Wembley Stadium in 1937. Like other leading riders, he travelled throughout the 1930s on an annual transcontinental circuit between Britain, Australia and the Americas. An American 'borne of Scotch parents', Milne rode for the London track New

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<sup>75</sup> Passenger Lists on <<http://www.ancestorsonboard.com/>>, searches for Judah Bergman and Eric Langton, accessed 20 February 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (London, 1993), 6.

<sup>77</sup> Bruce S. Elliott, "'Settling down": Masculinity, Class and the Rite of Return in a Transnational Community', in Marjory Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600-2000* (Manchester, 2005), 153-83, 153.

<sup>78</sup> Eric Richards, 'Running home from Australia: Intercontinental Mobility and Migrant Perceptions in the nineteenth-century', in Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings*, 77-104, 86.

<sup>79</sup> Foner, *From Ellis Island*, p. 184.

Cross and was described in the British press as a resident both 'of Los Angeles and Forest Hill'.<sup>80</sup> The *Daily Mirror*, which gave him his own weekly column in 1938, acknowledged his status as both world champion and 'hero of New Cross'.<sup>81</sup> His professionalism and showmanship were much admired and he was regarded as one the most popular riders to compete in Britain during the 1930s. Such was the popularity of Milne and other American riders, and the spectators' identification with them, that supporters' groups arranged 'Welcome Home' events to celebrate their arrival in Britain at the start of each speedway season.<sup>82</sup>

But we should not take this to mean that they were either assimilated as British sports 'stars' or necessarily distanced from their followers in the United States. Indeed much of the appeal of the American riders can be explained by their association with a set of characteristics combining stereotypical American qualities like individualism, competitiveness and exuberance with traditional British sporting values such as team play and sportsmanship.<sup>83</sup> Representing the United States in special individual and team events, and riding under the American flag, they remained strongly connected symbolically to their society of origin during the periods of the year when they worked overseas. And their achievements in British speedway were recognized and celebrated back 'home'. 'Sprouts' Elder, for example, was lauded in California as the 'national and international short-track champion', while Milne was greeted on his return at the beginning of the Second World War as one of 'the colorful stars' who had been away 'invading England in search of the international title'.<sup>84</sup>

Berg was another of this small group of elite athletes who became popular performers on both sides of the Atlantic. His first bouts in Chicago during 1928 earned him a reputation as an energetic and fearless fighter. From this and subsequent trips, he acquired a substantial following, particularly among Jewish fans who were attracted to the confident displays of ethnic identity (such as the ritual wearing and removal of religious garb prior to fights) that

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<sup>80</sup> *Speedway News*, 24 September 1938.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 17 April 1938.

<sup>82</sup> *Speedway News*, 30 April, 7 May 1938.

<sup>83</sup> *Speedway News*, 7 August 1937, 14, 28 May 1938.

<sup>84</sup> *Modesto News Herald*, 11 June 1933; *Fresno Bee*, 19 June 1940, <<http://xtremesport.org/oldtracks.html>>, accessed 16 October 2009.

Berg adopted in the United States to appeal to the partisan crowds.<sup>85</sup> Described variously by the local press as an ‘Englishman’, a ‘Briton’, a ‘Londoner’ and a ‘Jew’, Berg was able to build himself a substantial following among spectators in the boxing centres of Chicago and New York in particular.<sup>86</sup> His appeal to American sports journalists was based on his adoption of a distinctively American all-action boxing style and a transatlantic persona. By the early 1930s, according to his biographer, Berg ‘was becoming the All-American boy...dropping hints that he would be applying for American citizenship, mixing his East End Cockney accent with slang Americanisms and always accessible, adopting no airs and graces’.<sup>87</sup> The British press remained somewhat suspicious of Berg’s achievements overseas but his popularity among boxing followers at ‘home’ increased during his time away. This was particularly the case in London, where he remained a popular attraction inside and outside the ring, as in late 1930 when ‘huge crowds’ greeted him at Waterloo station and cheered him as he made his way by motor car to his family home in Whitechapel.<sup>88</sup>

In sport, the transnational networks maintained through communication back and forth had a significant public dimension. Emigrant athletes sent letters home to their families and friends but many also kept in contact with former employers and journalists, and some communicated their experiences abroad to the readers of local and national newspapers.<sup>89</sup> Intimation and gossip about the possible movement of soccer players and boxers back and forth across the Atlantic was a constant feature of the sports pages of British newspapers in

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<sup>85</sup> *The World* (New York), 18 January 1930; *New York Herald Tribune*, 18 January 1930; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 April 1931. See also Harding with Berg, *Jack Kid Berg*, pp. 85-96; Michael Berkowitz, ‘Jewish Blood-Sport: Between Bad Behavior and Respectability’, in Michael Berkowitz and Ruti Ungar (eds), *Fighting Back? Jewish and Black Boxers in Britain* (London, 2007), 67-81, 69, 70.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 July 1929, 18 April 1931; *The World* (New York), 18 January 1930; *New York Herald Tribune*, 17 January 1930; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 April 1931

<sup>87</sup> Harding with Berg, *Jack Kid Berg*, p. 144.

<sup>88</sup> *Boxing, Racing and Football*, 17 December 1930; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 April 1931; *East London Sports and Entertainments Mirror*, 26 January 1935; Trevor Wignall, *I Knew Them All* (London, 1938), 141.

<sup>89</sup> On the importance of letter writing in retaining links between emigrants and their homelands, see David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Cork, 1994); Ewa Morawska, ‘Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 1880-1914’, in Dirk Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch (ed.), *European Migrants: Global and Local Perspectives* (Boston, 1996), 170-208, 191-93; David A. Gerber, ‘The Immigrant Letter between Positivism and Popularism: The Uses of Immigrant Personal Correspondence in Twentieth-Century American Scholarship’, *Journal of Ethnic History*, 6 (1997), 3-34; Katherine M. Reynolds, *The Frauenstein Papers: Aspects of Nineteenth Century Emigration from the Duchy of Nassau to Australia* (Bern, 2009).

the 1920s. Muirhead, for instance, talked to Glasgow's *Sunday Post* about his decision to move to Boston and subsequently provided the newspaper with regular updates of his experiences in America.<sup>90</sup> The Welsh heavyweight boxer Tommy Farr, meanwhile, contributed an 'exclusive cablegram' to the *News of the World* each week during his two-month visit to New York in 1937 to challenge Joe Louis for the world heavyweight championship.<sup>91</sup> The fight was covered meticulously by much of the popular daily and weekly British press, featuring on the front pages, and in a series of newsreels, weeks before the bout itself.<sup>92</sup> The BBC broadcast the fight live on the radio in the early hours of the morning and many more watched the newsreels later on cinema screens.<sup>93</sup> Professional athletes at this level were public figures and were rarely forgotten by followers and supporters at home. Experiences varied of course but returning home was rationalized as a planned and inevitable part of the sporting career just as often as it was seen as the result of homesickness, unfulfilled expectations or a failure to achieve.<sup>94</sup> Such athletes were ordinary migrants in some respects but extraordinary in others. They were part of a nascent Anglophone 'culture of celebrity' that, through the continual circulation of images and stories in the mass media, was one of a number of ways in which Britons and Americans 'came to "know" each other in the inter-war years'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See *Sunday Post* (Glasgow), 18, 25 May, 13 July, 24 August 1924.

<sup>91</sup> *News of the World*, 25 July, 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 August, 5 September 1937.

<sup>92</sup> See *Daily Mirror*, 21, 23 August 1937; *Daily Mail*, 21 August 1937; *Daily Express*, 21, 23, 25 August 1937; *News of the World*, 25 July, 1, 8 August 1937; *The People*, 8, 15, 22 August 1937; 'Tommy Farr Trains in New York for Fight with Joe Louis', Gaumont British News, 29 July 1937, issue no. 374, News on Screen (hereafter NoS) no. 056451; 'Farr, Louis Sign: Tommy Says It's "poor Old Joe!"', British Paramount News, 29 July 1937, issue no. 670, NoS no. 035333; 'Tommy Farr in New York', British Movietone News, 29 July 1937, issue no. 425A, NoS no. 007840; 'Tommy Farr in Training', Pathe Super Sound Gazette, 5 August 1937, issue no. not known, NoS 095007; 'Boxing – Farr and Louis', British Movietone News, 23 August 1937, issue no. 429, NoS no. 007921, British Universities Film and Video Council, <[www.buafc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/](http://www.buafc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/)>, accessed March 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Siân Nicholas, 'American Commentaries: News, Current Affairs and the Limits of Anglo-American Exchange in Inter-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 4 (2007), 461-79, 469; 'Tommy Farr's Rise to Fame and Scenes in Tonypandy After His Great Fight with Louis', Gaumont British News, 2 September 1937, issue no. 384, NoS no. 056585; 'Farr Nearly Does It!', British Paramount News, 2 September 1937, issue no. 680, NoS no. 035406; 'Big Fight', British Movietone News, 2 September 1937, issue no. 430A, NoS no. 007952.

<sup>94</sup> On reasons for return more generally, see Wyman, *Round Trip to America*.

<sup>95</sup> Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales *Versus* Clark Gable: Anglophone Celebrity and Citizenship Between the Wars', *Cultural and Social History*, 4 (2007), 529-43, 540.

## Responses to Migration: Governments, Governing Bodies and Trade Unions

Official responses to the migration of sporting labour varied, but in all cases they were defined by relations between governing bodies, trade unions and the state. The importation of European sportsmen and sportswomen into the United States took place in the context of the wider immigration restrictions of the 1920s and 1930s. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 set a limit for the first time on immigration numbers, establishing annual quotas based on nationality.<sup>96</sup> The quota system favoured white and northwestern Europeans at the expense of southern and eastern Europeans, and initially banned Asian immigrants entirely, but it had limited impact on the relatively small numbers of footballers and boxers who travelled each year. British imports to the ASL were normally admitted under an initial six-month bond, making their American employers legally responsible for them during their stay.<sup>97</sup> Foreign boxers were taxed a percentage of their earnings but otherwise seem to have been free from the type of restrictions faced by actors, musicians and other entertainers.<sup>98</sup> With the depression affecting the American theatre more severely than in Britain, trade unions such as American Equity and the American Federation of Musicians lobbied for less talented foreign performers to be refused entry so as to protect the livelihood of American workers. A series of bills presented by the influential Congressman Samuel Dickstein in 1932 aimed to define actors and instrumentalists as 'contract labourers' and thus limit entry to those of 'distinguished ability'.<sup>99</sup> The Dickstein Acts impacted mostly on British dance bands, which were effectively barred from entry to the US, but despite some attempts at reciprocal

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York, 2007), pp. 279-82; Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 199-228.

<sup>97</sup> *Sunday Post* (Glasgow), 24 August 1924; *Topical Times*, 25 December 1926.

<sup>98</sup> TNA:PRO, HO45/18745, Ted Broadribb to Under Secretary of State, Home Office, 24 June 1931; Broadribb, *Fighting is my Life*, 100.

<sup>99</sup> *The Times*, 19, 30 March 1932; TNA:PRO, LAB8/72, Note on the admission of alien artistes and entertainers, 5 April 1937; M. Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier: A Social History of the Acting Profession* (London, 1984), 244-5; James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890-1950* (Baltimore, MD, 1996), 30, 211 (n. 47).



agreements, relations between American and British entertainment unions remained frosty throughout the 1930s.<sup>100</sup>

In British soccer, regulations governing both the emigration and immigration of workers were also potentially restrictive. The football authorities could do little to prevent players from crossing the Atlantic but they threatened to take a hard line on their return. To deter prospective emigrants, the Football League decided in 1926 to withhold the registration of players who moved to America until a full investigation of the circumstances had been carried out. A few months later it suspended Bob Wilson, a former Bradford Park Avenue employee who had moved to Fall River, for acting as an American agent and threatened to prevent its members from touring the United States 'so long as any American Club improperly attempts to interfere with any of our...clubs'.<sup>101</sup> Wilson and his teammate and fellow traveller Charlie Cook never returned to professional football in Britain but most emigrants found that the door to return remained open and that sanctions were rarely applied by employers.<sup>102</sup>

British responses to the importation of sporting labour evolved in the context of wider legislative initiatives. Interwar immigration policy was based on a series of measures ensuring strict state control over the entry and movement of aliens.<sup>103</sup> To all intents and purposes Britain, as Louise London has argued, 'was no longer a country of immigration'.<sup>104</sup> Under the Aliens Order of 1920, the Ministry of Labour could only issue work permits to aliens providing prospective employers showed that British workers were not available for the job in question.<sup>105</sup> The prevailing sense of superiority and national chauvinism among

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<sup>100</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 176, 7 August 1924, 3122-3W; *Daily Express*, 11 October 1935; James J. Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 2002), 145-6; Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford, 1985), 216-7; Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier*, 244.

<sup>101</sup> Football Association (FA), London, Minutes of Football League Management Committee, 13 December 1926, 7 March 1927.

<sup>102</sup> See Matthew Taylor, *The Leaguers: The Making of Professional Football in England, 1900-1939* (Liverpool, 2005), 229.

<sup>103</sup> Andreas Fahrmeir, 'Immigration and Immigration Policy in Britain from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Centuries', in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (eds), *European Immigrants in Britain, 1933-1950* (Munich, 2003), 50-53; T. W. E. Roche, *The Key in the Lock: Immigration Control In England from 1066 to the Present Day* (London, 1969), 79-99.

<sup>104</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948* (Cambridge, 2000), 18.

<sup>105</sup> Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke, 1988), 113-4.

British football administrators explains why few clubs seriously considered importing foreign footballers between the wars. Indeed no serious discussion of the matter took place until Herbert Chapman, the pioneering and cosmopolitan manager of London club Arsenal, attempted to sign the Austrian goalkeeper Rudy Hiden in the summer of 1930. Chapman agreed a transfer fee with Hiden's employers Vienna AC for an initial two-month period with further payments if the player signed for the rest of the season and the following year.<sup>106</sup> The move took the football authorities by surprise but not the popular press, which launched a campaign to prevent Hiden's arrival in England. *The People* and the *Daily Herald* were particularly vociferous on the matter, urging the Ministry of Labour to 'step in promptly and bar the transaction', so as to protect British jobs and prevent the money of working-class supporters leaving the country in the form of transfer fees.<sup>107</sup> For Charles Sutcliffe, a journalist and leading football administrator, the idea of importing foreign footballers was 'an insult to British-born players' and 'a terrible confession of weakness in the management of the club'.<sup>108</sup> 'If we have to make up league teams by the introduction of Austrians, Germans, Spaniards and Frenchmen', he argued, 'our play and our sportsmanship have fallen to a low ebb. I swear the people of this country will never be happy watching foreigners play in league football.'<sup>109</sup>

The Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, responded by canvassing the views of the British football associations and the Association Football Players' and Trainers' Union (AFPTU). All were opposed to the importation of 'alien' footballers.<sup>110</sup> Immigration officials at Dover had already blocked Hiden's entry into the country and so, backed by expert opinion, government policy was henceforth to refuse work permits on the grounds that 'there are enough of our own players available to meet the clubs' requirements' and that 'the importation of foreign professionals is neither reasonable nor necessary'.<sup>111</sup> The Football Association in England offered further protection when it decided on its own two-year residential qualification with the objective of protecting 'home players against foreign

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<sup>106</sup> Arsenal Football Club (AFC), London, Minutes of Arsenal FC Board of Directors, 10 July 1930.

<sup>107</sup> *The People*, 13 July 1930.

<sup>108</sup> *Topical Times*, 25 October 1930 (1<sup>st</sup> quotation), 23 August 1930 (2<sup>nd</sup> quotation).

<sup>109</sup> *Topical Times*, 26 July 1930.

<sup>110</sup> See FA, Minutes of Football Association International Selection Committee, 25 August 1930; PFA, Minutes of AFPTU, 25 August 1930 (AGM).

<sup>111</sup> As outlined retrospectively in TNA: PRO, LAB13/1480, minute, 5 April 1955; T. P. Harris to J. Hardman, 6 April 1955; Ministry of Labour to W. Warwick, 11 August 1958 (quotation).

competition'.<sup>112</sup> Taken together, these measures were sufficient to prevent the importation of non-British professional talent for the rest of the period, and indeed until the 1970s. Government inquiries into the status of those players who had returned from the ASL to Scotland eventually led to nothing but it did affect a small number of naturalized Americans, such as Scottish-born Alex Wood, who was refused a permit and signed initially for Leicester City as an amateur rather than a professional when he arrived from Brooklyn in 1933.<sup>113</sup>

A different set of circumstances existed in speedway. Unlike football and boxing, speedway was a recently imported sport with a relatively small pool of local talent. For promoters, the importation of 'star' riders from outside the British Isles was crucial to the sport's commercial viability and spectator appeal. We have seen that Australian riders, in particular, had been essential to speedway's initial popularity. They continued to account for a significant proportion of team rosters throughout the 1930s, while stars such as Vic Huxley, Ron Johnson and Max Grosskreutz were among the sport's main attractions. Australians and other 'colonials' were of course legally British and were recognized by the sporting press as 'our cousins' rather than foreigners.<sup>114</sup> A different attitude developed in relation to the small number of non-British riders at the top level of the sport. Concerned by the barriers to the emergence of British talent but conscious of the drawing power of the best foreign performers, the ACU arranged in 1932 in consultation with the Ministry of Labour to restrict entry to a limited number of foreign riders in cases where they were satisfied this would help 'retain or increase the employment of British nationals' by preventing teams closing down.<sup>115</sup> Promoters wishing to engage a foreign rider required the sanction of the ACU, which would then recommend the provision of a work permit by the government. The ACU also retained the authority to decide at which tracks riders were allocated, so as to ensure equality of competition between the teams.<sup>116</sup>

The decline of public support for speedway in the mid-1930s led promoters to make renewed searches for international talent. In 1936 Fred Mockford and Cecil Smith, the promoters at New Cross, arranged for the arrival of two Californian brothers, Jack and Cordy

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<sup>112</sup> FA, Minutes of FA Council, 1 June 1931 (AGM); *Athletic News*, 8 June 1931 (quotation).

<sup>113</sup> *Sporting Post*, 16 August 1930; *Athletic News*, 18 August 1930; *Topical Times*, 25 February 1939.

<sup>114</sup> *Speedway News*, 19 June 1937.

<sup>115</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/7, Minutes of ACU Track Committee, 5 May 1932; TNA: PRO, LAB8/1935, Note of a meeting with Speedway Control Board, 10 June 1953.

<sup>116</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 26 April, 12 May 1933, 3 March 1938; *Speedway*, 14 April 1938.

Milne, who had been riding in Australia. Another American, Wilbur Lamoreaux, signed for the Wimbledon team the following year and a so-called 'war' for foreign talent erupted among promoters.<sup>117</sup> In contrast to their football counterparts, most speedway promoters and administrators supported the importation of labour so as to make good the shortage of first-class British riders. In the view of E.O. Spence, manager of the national champions Belle Vue, the Americans were not being imported 'to pay British money into American pockets' but 'to help speedway racing'.<sup>118</sup> Without their admission, the ACU informed the Ministry of Labour, speedway racing was likely to 'suffer a serious decline'.<sup>119</sup> Plans to attach an extra foreign rider to each track in the National League were attacked by the Speedway Riders' Association (SRA), however, which saw their importation as 'prejudicial' to domestic riders and feared that the sport as a whole could 'drift out of the hands of Britishers'. The Ministry of Labour restated its policy only to approve work permits in 'very special circumstances' where 'a track is in danger of closing down and throwing British employees out of work'.<sup>120</sup> But the debate over foreign labour intensified when Mockford and Smith announced in July 1937 that they had contracted a team of four new American riders to tour British tracks. The SRA balloted its members and threatened a strike in response.<sup>121</sup> A compromise was eventually reached, but the Ministry of Labour tightened its restrictions further the following season, limiting future applications to the four Americans and one Dane who were already riding in Britain.<sup>122</sup>

The leading trade journal, *Speedway News*, launched a campaign during the 1938 season designed to persuade the Ministry of Labour to continue issuing work permits for foreign riders. While it accepted that Whitehall had 'never been well disposed' to their import in the first place, it argued that the American riders, in particular, had 'revitalized the sport, attracted thousands of new patrons, brought back more who were beginning to lose interest, and created a wave of optimism which encouraged the growth of the sport in the

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<sup>117</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 5 March, 2, 23 April 1936; *Daily Express*, 17 March 1936; *Speedway News* (Winter Bulletin), February 1937.

<sup>118</sup> *News of the World*, 25 July 1937.

<sup>119</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Track Committee, 25 February 1937.

<sup>120</sup> *Speedway News* (Winter Bulletin), February 1937. See also *Daily Express*, 3, 12 February 1937.

<sup>121</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 23, 29 July, 2 September 1937; *Speedway News*, 17, 31 July, 7 August 1937; *Speedway World*, 1 October 1937.

<sup>122</sup> MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 10 February, 3 March 1938; *Speedway News*, 16 April 1938.

provinces'.<sup>123</sup> Despite the aborted strike the previous season, most 'sensible riders', it was now claimed, embraced speedway's 'international element' and recognized that 'instead of reducing the prospects of British riders the foreigners in our midst have greatly improved them'.<sup>124</sup> The government had initially intimated that the employment of foreign riders would be further restricted to non-league competitions and guest appearances, but the lobbying of the speedway authorities and the press eventually bore fruit and the American riders returned for the final pre-war season.<sup>125</sup>

In view of the international dimension of competition, the importation of foreign labour had been a long-standing issue in boxing. There were no formal restrictions until the late 1920s, with foreign boxers permitted to land and work in Britain at the discretion of government officials.<sup>126</sup> In early 1929, however, the Ministry of Labour was alerted to the presence of a number of German boxers competing at minor halls in the north-east of England for small cash prizes and 'to the detriment of British boxers of comparable standard'.<sup>127</sup> The Ministry acted quickly to reach agreement with a newly reconstituted BBBC on a system for regulating the admission of foreign boxers. From that point on, permits were granted on the advice of the BBBC, which restricted recommendations to licensed boxers considered 'reputable...in a professional sense' and of a sufficiently high standard.<sup>128</sup> Temporary permits were normally issued for a period to cover a single engagement – usually one week – but this was increased to two months in the case of American fighters travelling longer distances, with subsequent extensions to six months and even a year in certain cases.<sup>129</sup> The BBBC's influence in restricting foreign imports was criticized by some – one MP accused it of rejecting the application of an American world champion that it had a bias against – but the flow of boxers into Britain does not seem to have

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<sup>123</sup> *Speedway News*, 14 May 1938 (1<sup>st</sup> quotation), 16 July 1938 (2<sup>nd</sup> quotation).

<sup>124</sup> *Speedway News*, 16 July 1938.

<sup>125</sup> *Speedway News* (Winter Bulletin), December 1938.

<sup>126</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745, Leendert Joshua Sanders, Conditional Landing Reports, 13 October 1927, 26 January 1928.

<sup>127</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745, Frankie Genaro, Admission to UK in 1929, minute, 25 November 1930; TNA: PRO, LAB8/1932, Note on the admission of foreign boxers to fulfil professional engagements, 22 November 1947, (quotation).

<sup>128</sup> TNA: PRO, LAB8/1932, Note on the admission of foreign boxers to fulfil professional engagements, 22 November 1947.

<sup>129</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745, Leendert Joshua Sanders, Conditional Landing Reports, 18 October 1930, 1 November 1931, 22 April 1933; *The Times*, 30 May 1935, 29 October 1938.

been significantly disrupted.<sup>130</sup> Twenty-nine permits were issued between June and November 1929 and by the mid-1930s over 200 boxers and wrestlers were coming to Britain each year.<sup>131</sup> Unlike other sports, boxing was considered by the government alongside its more general policy on the admission of entertainers. In 1937, the Ministry of Labour rejected American claims that it adopted a 'restrictive attitude' to American actors, musicians and entertainers, arguing instead that its policy, like that of the US Department of Labor, was 'aimed at preventing the free entry of low paid or mediocre artists not at restricting the activities of distinguished or outstanding performers'. The Ministry claimed that it had been generous in its treatment of applications, rejecting less than three per cent of those from American boxers and wrestlers between 1934 and 1936.<sup>132</sup>

As in speedway, the issue of foreign labour in boxing became a major flashpoint between unions and employers. Founded in 1934, the National Union of Boxers (NUB) rapidly emerged as an influential defender of boxers' rights as well as a vociferous opponent of the BBBC and its policies.<sup>133</sup> Part of this remit involved protection of its members from 'unfair competition from abroad'. Spokesmen claimed that the union was not opposed to the importation of all foreign boxers but only of inferior fighters arriving at a time when British boxers 'are pleading for work and opportunities to rise to the top'.<sup>134</sup> It was especially critical of permits being issued to little known continental fighters or ageing former American champions such as Max Baer and 'King' Levinsky – "back numbers" in the boxing sense – who took 'thousands of pounds out of the country to the detriment of deserving British boxers'.<sup>135</sup> A particular union target was the BBBC's privileged consultative role in the consideration of work permits. It lobbied hard to be recognized by the Ministry of Labour as the workers' representative in the same way as trade unions in other industries. In correspondence with the TUC, the NUB secretary accused the BBBC of being a self-

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<sup>130</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 231, 7 November 1929, 1218-9; TNA: PRO, HO45/18745, E. O'Connor & Co. (Solicitors) to Home Office, 18 November 1930.

<sup>131</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 231, 7 November 1929, 1218-9; 323, 29 April 1937, 537-8. The precise number of foreign boxers and wrestlers granted work permits were: 170 in 1932, 167 in 1933, 205 in 1934, 212 in 1935 and 206 in 1936.

<sup>132</sup> TNA: PRO, LAB8/72, Note on the admission of alien artistes and entertainers, 5 April 1937. See also *Box Office*, 26 January 1935; *Time*, 8 June 1936; Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier*, 244-45.

<sup>133</sup> See Matthew Taylor, "Boxers United: Trade Unionism in British Boxing in the 1930s", *Sport in History*, 29 (2009), 457-78.

<sup>134</sup> *Boxing*, 14 October 1936.

<sup>135</sup> MRC, MSS 292/91/30, H. Flower to E. Brown, 10 May 1937.

appointed employers' association rather than a governing body: 'It is a well know fact in the profession...that the boxers have no power in it'.<sup>136</sup> A number of trade union officials and MPs lobbied on its behalf but the Ministry of Labour consistently refused to reconsider its policy on permits or meet with NUB representatives. It preferred to deal with the BBBC, a 'joint body' which it believed represented 'all the interests' of the boxing industry.<sup>137</sup>

There was a further dimension to the debate over foreign labour in boxing: the issue of race. The policies of the Home Office and the boxing authorities had been interconnected in this respect since before the First World War. From 1909, a colour bar had been included in the regulations of, first, the National Sporting Club (NSC), and then the BBBC, which precluded black boxers from fighting for championship titles in Britain. On a number of occasions in the early twentieth century, meanwhile, the Home Office had intervened to prevent major bouts between imported black and white British boxers. The prohibition of the fights between the African-American world heavyweight champion Jack Johnson and Bombardier Billy Wells in 1911, and the French-Senegalese 'Battling' Siki and Joe Beckett in 1922, set a precedent for Home Office policy in the 1920s.<sup>138</sup> Henceforth high profile contests between blacks and whites were discouraged on the grounds that they might incite public disorder at home and elsewhere in the Empire.<sup>139</sup> In theory, the treatment of interracial contests was distinct from that of 'alien' imports but, in certain cases, they became intertwined. In 1926 and 1927, for example, the Home Office advised the representative of 'Tiger' Flowers and 'Sunny' Jim Williams against setting up engagements for the boxers in Britain, while the Aliens Branch instructed immigration officials to prevent them from

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<sup>136</sup> MRC, MSS 292/91/30, H. Flower to W. Citrine, 3 May 1937.

<sup>137</sup> MRC, MSS 292/91/30, T. S. Chegwiddden to National Union of Boxers, 28 April 1937; TUC Assistant Secretary to H. Flower, 17 May 1937; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 318, 8 December 1936, 1839-40W; 323, 29 April 1937, 537-8.

<sup>138</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/48, Memo, Boxing contests between black men and white, 17 January 1931; HO45/18745/97, Minute, 30 July 1941. On the proposed Johnson-Wells fight, see TNA: PRO, MEPO2/1474. On Siki-Beckett, see TNA: PRO, HO45/11880. On the colour bar more generally, see Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure, 1918-1939* (London, 1986), p. 188; Patrick F. McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win: Sport, Masculinity and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935* (New York, 2004), pp. 58-80.

<sup>139</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745, 476649/48, C. Donmall to J.R. Clynes, 5 January 1931; J.R. Clynes to Lord Lonsdale, 21 January 1931; Lord Lonsdale to Clynes, 22 January 1931.

landing.<sup>140</sup> ‘The special importation of a black boxer’, it was felt, ‘would almost certainly arouse a good deal of adverse comment, even if he should not be so notorious a pug as Siki’.<sup>141</sup> Yet the government preferred a discretionary approach, stopping short of a settled policy on the non-admission of ‘coloured’ boxers. No official distinction was therefore made in the admission of foreign boxers on the basis of colour and other black Americans such as George Christian and ‘Panama’ Al Brown consequently fought regularly in British rings.<sup>142</sup>

During the 1930s, however, BBBC and Home Office policy diverged as the former lobbied more directly to racialize the admission of American boxers. The case of Obie Walker is particularly instructive here. In early 1935 Walker was contracted to fight against a white British heavyweight at the Albert Hall. Although it initially sponsored Walker’s application on sporting grounds, the BBBC then attempted to persuade the government to use the Aliens Order to specifically exclude Walker and other ‘coloured’ foreign boxers. In a letter to the Home Secretary, it outlined the rationale for its view. First, it reiterated its opposition to all interracial fights but acknowledged that it was ‘not practicable’ to exclude black colonial fighters. It also claimed that there was ‘an ample supply of white boxers, British and Foreign, available to promoters’ and that ‘coloured’ fighters tended to box for lower purses and so undercut their white British counterparts. In addition, the negative affect on spectators – ‘especially when the coloured boxer is the victor’ – led it to favour a new policy ‘not to forward applications for coloured Boxers who are not of British Empire citizenship’.<sup>143</sup> The Home Office considered but rejected the request, noting that it might lead to protests from the US and French governments and prompt suspicions that its entire immigration policy was influenced by ‘colour prejudice’. Such a policy would also, it was felt, be difficult to enforce or confine to boxers, thus ‘open[ing] the door to all kinds of insidious application of similar character’. A Home Office official concluded that the boxing

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<sup>140</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/21, Home Office to J. Marks, 29 October 1926; TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/22, A. Crapper to J. Marks, 14 April 1927; Memo, W. Haldane Porter, H.M. Chief Inspector, Aliens Branch, HO to All Ports, Scotland Yard, undated.

<sup>141</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/22, Minute, 12 April 1927.

<sup>142</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/ 22, Copy of minute on Aliens Branch File, Misc 5174, 4 May 1927; TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/53, Report of meeting with members of the British Boxing Board of Control, 11 July 1931; Shaw, ‘Ringside at the Graveyard’, p. 53.

<sup>143</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/88, H. C. Guest to Secretary of State, 21 February 1935.



authorities were 'afraid to tackle the question itself'.<sup>144</sup> If it wanted a 'colour bar' on all contests, the BBBC should be prepared to say so publicly and deal with the criticism.<sup>145</sup>

## Conclusion

Although relatively small in volume, entertainment workers constituted a disproportionately significant stream of interwar migration between Britain and the United States. As public performers and objects of identification, actors, musicians and athletes were culturally important figures. Their movement across national and continental boundaries had social and political implications that could impact on the lives of thousands, and sometimes millions, of people in the sending and receiving societies. The sports hero or star, in particular, acted as a repository for ideas about locality, nation, empire, age, class, race, gender and morality. He or she could become a symbol or emblem 'linking the style of the performance with a sense of a wider community', and possessing 'an unrivalled capacity to emotionally lift and inspire' spectators and followers.<sup>146</sup> This was equally true of the imported athlete, whose reception was dependent upon a particular configuration of local traditions and styles, conceptions of citizenship and attitudes to foreigners and foreign labour.<sup>147</sup>

However, historians of all hues are still remarkably reluctant to acknowledge the degree to which forms of entertainment such as sport were capable of shaping, as well simply reflecting or reinforcing, public attitudes and ideologies. This article has demonstrated that the movement of sporting labour was but one strand of larger migration systems, and that official responses to the importation of footballers, boxers and speedway riders were embedded in the wider policies of national governments and trade unions. Professional sport was not a world of its own but an increasingly important arena of cultural life that fed the

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<sup>144</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/88, Minute, 22 February 1935. See also Royal Albert Hall Archive, Minute Book No. 15, Minutes of Council, 20 March 1935, Copy of letter from John Gilmour to Earl of Onslow, 2 March 1935.

<sup>145</sup> TNA: PRO, HO45/18745/88, Memo, 27 February 1935.

<sup>146</sup> Richard Holt and J.A. Mangan, 'Prologue: Heroes of a European Past', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13 (1996), 1-11, 10 (1<sup>st</sup> quotation); Barry Smart, *The Sport Star: Modern Sport and the Cultural Economy of Sporting Celebrity* (London, 2005), 199 (2<sup>nd</sup> quotation).

<sup>147</sup> Christian Bromberger, 'Foreign Footballers, Cultural Dreams and Community Identity in some North-western Mediterranean Cities', in Bale and Maguire (eds), *Global Sports Arena*, 171-82.

imaginations and beliefs of spectators and followers. We can never be sure, for example, how far popular attitudes to imported sportsmen and sportswomen were transferred to other foreign workers. What is clear, however, is that responses to the importation of foreigners in sport, as in other industries, were complicated and often dependent on particular contexts and circumstances.<sup>148</sup> In British speedway racing, for instance, which suffered from a deficit of local talent, governing bodies, track owners and supporters regarded the importation of American riders as vital to the financial survival of the sport.<sup>149</sup> But even in these circumstances, trade union representatives could find support among those who urged the authorities to 'stick by the English riders' and bemoaned the 'buying and selling of colonial and foreign stars to represent local teams'.<sup>150</sup> In boxing and soccer, sports in which foreign practitioners were often considered less skilled than their British compatriots, expressions of protectionism were more readily articulated.

Professional athletes travelled migratory routes that both reflected broader industrial patterns and displayed sporting peculiarities. In a period of rising unemployment, slowing migration and increasing state control over the importation of foreign workers in Europe and North America, they too faced restrictions from governments, trade unions and national and international federations. National and racial exclusionism was not unknown, as the case of boxing shows, but cultural insularity was less marked in a sector undergoing an increased internationalization of competition and an unprecedented mobility in its workforce. Local and national sporting cultures between the wars were becoming increasingly interconnected and linked together by networks of people, information and capital that often cut across national jurisdiction. This was as true of boxing and soccer, established sports with deep international roots, as it was of the new developing professional sport of speedway racing. All relied to varying degrees upon networks of official competition and international regulatory bodies but also on the web of personal, cultural and business connections that were so important to international integration across the so-called British world and beyond.<sup>151</sup>

The study of the migration of professional athletes illuminates the complex relationship between national and transnational identities in the interwar period. Whilst North

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<sup>148</sup> Kenneth Lunn, 'Race Relations or Industrial Relations?: Race and Labour in Britain, 1880-1950', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 4 (1985), 1-29.

<sup>149</sup> See MRC, ACU 660/1/1/9, Minutes of ACU Speedway Control Board, 3 September 1936; Minutes of ACU Track Committee, 25 February 1937.

<sup>150</sup> *Speedway World*, 8 October 1937; *The People*, 6 July 1930.

<sup>151</sup> Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*.

American and British sporting cultures were in some respects exclusive, inward-looking and insular, and characterized by the predominance of 'national' sports, such as baseball and soccer, they were also interconnected in profound ways. The transatlantic networks that bound associations, clubs, athletes, administrators and sports journalists together, and facilitated the circulation of sporting talent, were often deeply-rooted, proving sufficiently strong to withstand the wider cultural and economic retreat of the interwar years. Indeed, such was the blossoming of international sporting competition that national governments and governing bodies risked the loss of international prestige if they chose to stand outside such competitive entanglements, and to protect domestic sports from the 'invasion' of foreign competitors and players. For their part, the best known athletes were increasingly coming to be perceived as transnational as well as national stars, representing local and national communities and projecting them onto a wider stage, yet also helping to bridge the cultural gap between the two societies.