

CAN THE SUBALTERN PLAY?
POSTCOLONIAL TRANSITION AND THE MAKING OF
BASKETBALL AS THE NATIONAL SPORTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

BY

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ABBREVIATIONS

AHC	American Historical Collection, RL-ADMU
BHL-UMI	Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan
FECG	Far Eastern Championship Games
FIBA	<i>Federacion Internationale du Basketball</i>
MBBL	Manila Bay Baseball League
MICAA	Manila Industrial and Commercial Athletic Association
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration (US)
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NBA	National Basketball Association (US)
PAAF	Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation
PBA	Philippine Basketball Association
PNL	Philippine National Library
RG	Record Group
RL-ADMU	Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University
UPML	University of the Philippines Main Library
UPVM	University of the Philippines Vargas Museum
US-LOC	United States Library of Congress
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YMCA-UMN	Kauts Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota

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SUMMARY

This study examines the convergence of the concepts of subalternity and postcolonialism in the context of the formation of a national sporting culture in the Philippines. In particular, the historical-sociological inquiry looks into the origins of basketball's introduction and popularity, the patterns of its spread and significance, and its relationship with the formation of the Philippine nation-state in the 20th century. The analysis centers on how basketball developed from a colonial implant to a popular national pastime through a set of complex and contradictory processes that paralleled the emergence of a national consciousness. Hence, basketball is generally seen as an abundant repository of countless events and narratives, of various symbols and representations that provides an opportunity for a unique perspective in understanding some important aspects of Philippine history, culture, and society.

The first chapter presents the rationale of the study and the objectives that it aspires to complete. It will also provide a brief discussion of the changing nature of the relationship between sport and society and how it is being analyzed and articulated by various scholars. Focusing on the American colonial period, Chapter Two attempts to reconstruct the beginning of Philippine basketball by tracing its location in the larger colonial dynamics through the analysis of specific policies and the prevailing ideologies and overall sentiments regarding US imperialism, and its occupation of the Philippines. It also explores the relationship between physical education and sports through several issues such as race, religion, and sovereignty that defines the general social condition of this

particular historical period. Chapter Three examines the celebrated rivalry between baseball and basketball as the premier sporting pastime in the country from the early American colonial era up to the period shortly after the Second World War. Generally, the close association of baseball with the American as an “occupation force”, in contrast to basketball’s general image as a representation of the “benevolent America” has resulted into the decline of the former and the rise of the latter.

Furthermore, Chapter Four looks into the “Hollywoodization of Hoops”, which described the process that turned the country’s premier basketball league into an important aspect of the local entertainment industry. It focuses on how the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) capitalized on its popularity as a primetime television spectacle and its celebrity-studded teams to sustain the game’s prominence in the local sports scene despite its mediocre performance in international competitions. Chapter Five provides a view of basketball from the rafters. “Rooting for the Underdogs” explores the connection between sport, spectacle and subalternity by tracing how basketball is used as a metaphor to portray the general social predicaments of many Filipinos who endured a long period of colonization, marginalization, and poverty. Chapter Six deals with the impact of globalization on Philippine basketball. Primarily, it describes how the expansion of the American basketball empire has contributed to the decline of the local professional league at the turn of the millennium. Finally, the last chapter concludes by emphasizing the theoretical contribution of the study in the sociology of sport science, as well as in the fields of postcolonial and subaltern studies.

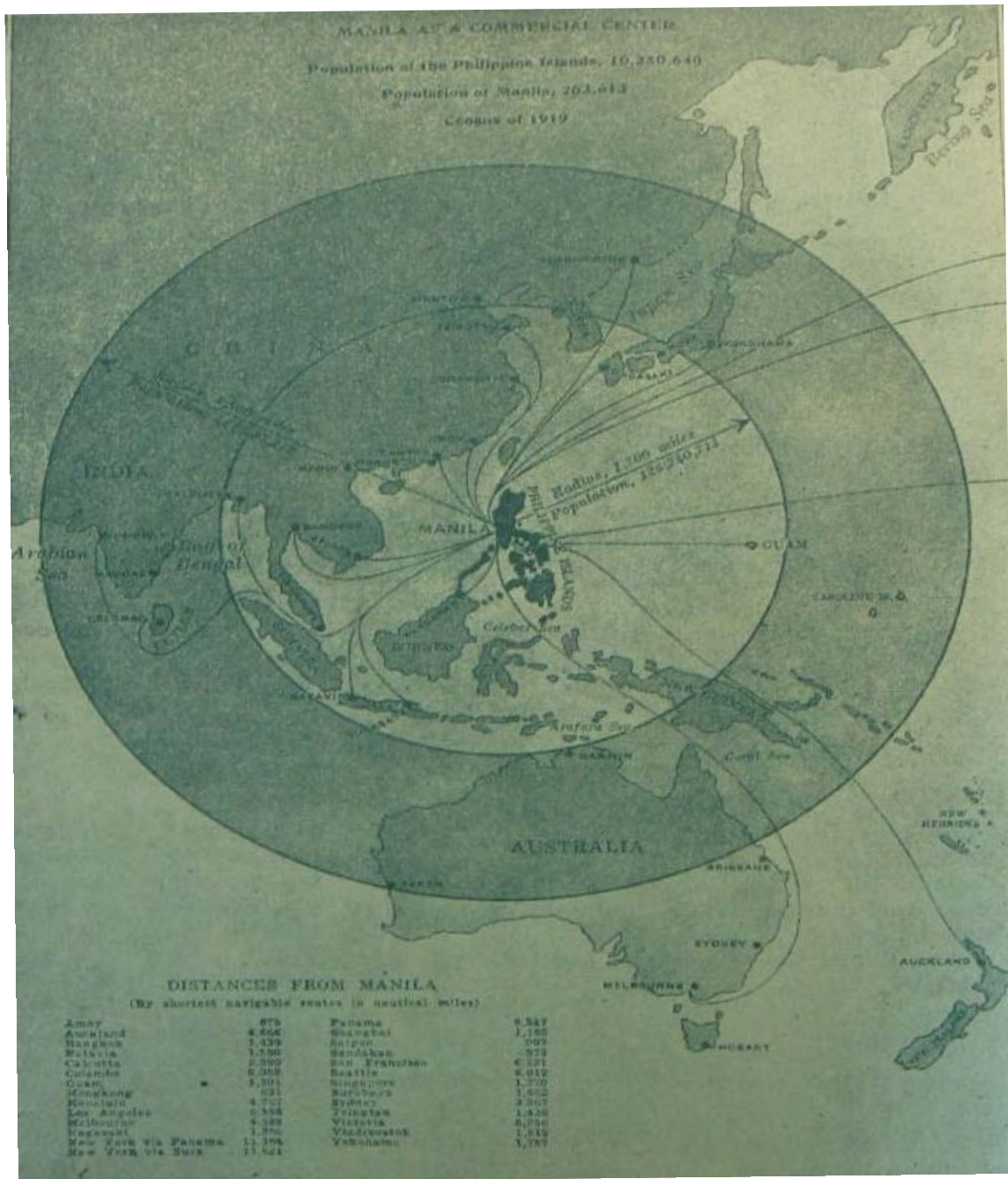


Figure 1. Spheroid of Influence: A highly publicized map of the Philippines circulated during the annual Manila Carnival (1908-1939). It depicts the country inside a basketball-shaped sphere emphasizing its strategic location for development as the commercial and cultural hub of Asia. RG 350-E5-5453-99A US NARA.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Playing With The Big Boys

Tatangkad din ako! (I, too, shall be tall!), is the trademark catchphrase in a series of television commercials promoting a brand of children multi-vitamin supplement in the Philippines. The brand distinguishes itself through a unique formula that apart from giving the necessary nutrients also promises to enhance the growth of young children. Fittingly enough, when the first version of the advertisement series came out in 2006, it was intended to have basketball as its main theme. Designed like a hip-hop MTV music video, the television commercial shows a group of five young kids doing a song and dance performance. During the routine, the youngsters are shown proficiently executing different basketball tricks and even exhibiting a particular skill that is a rare sight in Filipino basketball games: dunking the ball. By creatively stitching together different elements of contemporary Filipino youth culture (hip hop, MTV, and basketball), the advertisement became one of the most popular television commercials; its jingle evolved into a popular children's song and over a short time, the advertising slogan itself developed into a familiar everyday adage.

Beyond its marketing success, *Tatangkad din ako!* presents some interesting insights into contemporary Philippine society. Notably, it reflects the country's obsession for "adding some extra inches" as shown in the popularity of growth enhancement formulas that, aside from coming in food supplements, are also added in milk, sandwich spread,

hotdogs, and other food products. Likewise, the television commercial has also shown that this obsession for growth is largely associated with the Filipinos' other obsession: the sport of basketball. Basketball has gone a long way since it was first introduced by US soldiers and missionaries during the early period of the American colonial period at the turn of the twentieth century. Currently, the ubiquitous presence of hardcourts and makeshift hoops across the country and the extensive coverage that basketball attracts from television and other forms of mass media are testaments of how deeply it has taken roots as the most popular participatory and spectator sport in the Philippines.

In a larger context, *Tatangkad din ako!* illustrates the main theme that is central to this research project: the relationship between sports and postcolonial/subaltern societies. Throughout history, sports act as means by which imperialist societies exercise informal yet equally transformative influence while simultaneously providing the mechanism for subaltern groups to mobilize resistance and assert their own identity.¹ In the Philippines, basketball stands both as a symbol of nationalism and as a remnant of its colonial past. For instance, the Philippine basketball team's credible showing (a controversial fifth-place finish)² at the 1936 Berlin Olympics two years after the country acquired a limited

¹ James H. Mills, *Subaltern Sports: Politics and Sport in South Asia*, (London: Anthem Press, 2005).

² The Philippines' fifth place standing became a subject of controversy because their 4-1 win-loss record was better than fourth place Poland (1-2), third place Mexico (3-2) and even second place Canada (3-1). The Philippines even defeated the Mexican team in their encounter with a come-from-behind 32-30 score. It was the first time that basketball was played at the Olympics and a loophole in the bracketing system was overlooked resulting in the issue with ranking. This problem was later corrected for the subsequent Olympic Games. See Jorge Afable (ed.), *Philippine Sports Greats*, (Mandaluyong City: MAN Publishers, 1972).

self-governing power through the Philippine Independence Act³ became a source of national pride and a means to promote international recognition for the emerging sovereign nation. Before this event, the country had already won nine out of the ten basketball championships in the Far Eastern Games (1913-1934). Subsequently, a third place finish at the World Basketball Championships in 1954 and four straight Asian Games championships from 1951 to 1962 cemented the position of basketball as the country's "national sport"⁴. However, despite its importance as a symbol of the nation's emergence, the popularity of basketball in the Philippines remains as an enduring mark of the country's subalternity. The country, for example, has been criticized largely for "blindly" following an American game that generally does not suit the physical make up of the Filipinos. This criticism has even become more cogent with the current mediocre standing of the Philippines in top international basketball competitions.

As an American colonial implant, basketball represents the Philippine's ambiguous relationship to its former colonial master. At one hand, the game illustrates the Filipinos

³ More popularly known as the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the Philippine Independence Act is the piece of legislation that established the Commonwealth of the Philippines, a ten-year transitional government in preparation for full Philippine independence and sovereignty. Under this arrangement, the Filipinos were able to enact its own constitution and elect its own executive and legislative officials. Although foreign policy and military affairs would be under the responsibility of the US, certain legislation still requires the approval of the American president. See Julian Go and Anne Foster (eds.), *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*, (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2005).

⁴ The word "national sport" is often synonymously equated with "national pastime", which refers to a sport that has a widespread and fervent following in a particularly society. However, in the Philippines, it is necessary to distinguish basketball as a national sport with the country's official sport, which is *sipa*. *Sipa* is a traditional team sport, similar to *sepak takraw* that basically involves kicking a ball made of rattan back and forth over a net in the middle of the court.

ability to integrate some of the “modern ways” that the American colonial regime tried to establish through its various development programs, including sports and physical education. The national team’s early success in international basketball competitions, for instance, was used not only to legitimize the widespread plea for Philippine sovereignty but was also employed to promote the achievements of the American “tutelage”⁵ of the Filipinos. According to Guttman, the country’s victory was attained because:

... the Philippines were then under American rule and far more influenced by American sports than the Chinese or the Japanese, it was hardly a surprise that the home team, which greatly outnumbered the visitors, won most of the events, including the basketball championship.⁶

In fact, when the Philippines beat a strong Israeli team at the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki, the victory was described as a demonstration of “the influence of countless United States service teams that have played there.” In addition, the writer boasted about how “[t]his was another example of how the US, through associations like the YMCA and through its military posts, had helped bolster basketball’s popularity [in the country]”.⁷ However, when the Philippines, later on, failed to sustain its high standing in international basketball competitions, the series of losses were often used as a sign of regression.

⁵ After crushing the First Philippine Republic during the Philippine-American War, the US justified their continued control by claiming that the Filipinos are still unfit for independence. The Americans then, implemented a process of “benevolent assimilation” where a democratic government patterned after the American system was instituted. The Filipinos were basically tutored in the intricacies of governance while gradually given the responsibilities in running the state affairs until full independence was granted. See Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines*, (New York: Random House, 1989).

⁶ Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sport and Cultural Imperialism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 102-03.

⁷ Carson Cunningham, *American Hoops: The History of United States Olympic Basketball from Berlin to Barcelona*, PhD Dissertation, Purdue University, 2006: 194.



Figure 2. A 1990 editorial cartoon showing a caricature of a Filipino player standing in front of towering American hoopsters. Take note of the name of famous US Dream Team members (Jordan, Johnson, and Ewing) on their uniforms. Figure reproduced from *Sports Flash* Vol. 6, No. 299 (April 13-19, 1989): 9. Periodicals Section, RL-ADMU.

The country's lack of success in maintaining its high ranking in international basketball competitions from the 1930s to the 1960s is often used to portray the Philippines' overall decline that is more evident in its failure to sustain its promising economic growth during the early post-WWII period. Moreover, both the basketball and economic failures are largely seen to reflect the colony's inability to propagate the seeds of modernity that were planted during the American regime. Hence, the Philippines' shortcomings in maintaining a lofty international standing in a game that has been considered as its national sports represents the inherent limitations (e.g. height) that hinder the country's progress as a nation. At present, the criticisms against the country's mediocre

performance in international basketball competitions has threatened its legitimacy as the “national sport” and its continuing decline has turned the game from a source of pride and inspiration into a perennial cause of disappointment and national shame.

Yet, the resilience of basketball in keeping its primary position in Philippine sports despite its dreaded mediocrity and the resulting criticisms thrown at its way is simply remarkable. This “audacity of hoop” illustrates how the sport is deeply entrenched in the Filipino culture that despite the serious quagmire where it is in now, basketball is still considered as a bearer of hope. Countless Filipino basketball fans, despite their frustrations, are still optimistic that a future success in basketball could signal the country’s long-awaited resurgence. Again, the multi-vitamin advertisement shows this remarkable sense of hope that Filipinos have bestowed on the shaky hands of their basketball players. *Tatangkad din ako!* or “I, too, shall be tall!” can easily be understood as an optimistic expression that the country will someday experience “growth”. However, the preoccupation with “getting tall”, as reflected by the naïve kids singing and dancing in the television commercial, can be just another absurd obsession with something that, for Filipinos, is really impossible to achieve.

CAN THE SUBALTERN PLAY?

The project focuses on the history and culture of basketball in the Philippines. The sport’s important location in Philippine society brings about various practical and theoretical issues, which inform current discourses in the sociology of sport as well as in the larger domains of historical sociology, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. Particularly,

the research aims to achieve the following goals: 1) to give an historical account of the origin of basketball's introduction and popularity in the Philippines; 2) to illustrate the patterns of its spread and significance; 3) to examine the development of the sport in relation to the larger socio-cultural dynamics in the different periods of the country's history; and 4) explore its relevance and contributions to the various discourses on imperialism, state-building, and subalternity.

With these objectives, the study views basketball as an abundant repository of countless events and narratives, of various symbols and representations that provide an opportunity for a unique perspective in understanding some important aspects of Philippine history, culture, and society. How did Philippine basketball evolve from a colonial game to a popular national sporting culture? What are the rationalities behind the extraordinary popularity of basketball among the Filipinos? How are the meaning, organization, and purpose of basketball connected with the local material conditions, social relations, and cultural traditions? Clearly, such questions invite a closer look at the complex relations between imperialist sport cultures and the local cultural rationalities, and the ways in which they are dialectically and historically informed.

Expanding the game to the larger playing field, which straddles the realms of imperialism and subaltern studies, the dissertation, argues that Philippine basketball reflects the subaltern predicament of "playing with the big boys". Literally, this concept illustrates the dilemma that relatively shorter Filipino players (see Table 2) experience in competing against tall and athletic opponents when they play the country's "national game" in

international competitions. In metaphorical sense, “playing with the big boys” generally embodies the struggles, the joys of playing, the thrills of victory, and the frustrations of losing that the Philippines, as a subaltern society, experiences in its relationship with imperialist powers, especially in its relationship with the United States, the country’s former colonial master and the current global hegemonic power.

The concept of subalternity here originates from the work of Ranajit Guha on the historiography of colonial India.⁸ Following Guha’s definition, James Mills, in his introduction to the edited volume titled “Subaltern Sports”, referred to the term subaltern as “the dominated party in any power relationship [while] the study of subalternity is of relationships characterized by ‘dominance without hegemony.’” Thus “[t]he importance of the concept of subalternity”, he explain further:

[L]ies in its recognition of the ‘autonomous domain’ of the subaltern agent or agents. While dominated, the subaltern is not entirely obliterated and retains values, ideas and modes of action that are not prescribed by the dominant and which can draw upon beliefs and experiences exclusive to the individual or group. In other words the subaltern always has the potential to oppose or resist the dominant as he or she may draw upon alternative values and ideas and can refer back to different experiences and behavioral expectations.⁹

Subalternity, in this particular study, covers a broad range of spectrum. Primarily, the term is used to represent the position of the Philippines (and the Filipinos) as a colonial and neo-colonial subject/s that has been continually exposed to the political, economic, and cultural dominance of the United States as its colonial master and eventually as the hegemonic global power in the twentieth century. Beneath this overarching level of

⁸ Ranajit Guha, “On some aspects of the Historiography of India”, in R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁹ Mills, *Subaltern Sports*, 1.

interaction, however, the word “subaltern” also analogously refers to Philippine basketball, in general, and in its various characterizations as a representation of the nation/society, or in reference to particular marginalized Filipino basketball players, teams, and fans discussed in the coming chapters.

Conceptually, this study tries to understand the subalternity of Philippine basketball following a postcolonial approach. Postcolonialism, following the definition of John Bale and Mike Cronin, is used to refer to particular time periods (colonial, post-independence, global), a subject of analysis (postcolonial sport as a series of historical and social phenomenon), and as a theory.¹⁰ As a theoretical framework, it follows the “post-binary” approach that is particularly gaining more following in the fields of postcolonial and subaltern studies. This analytical viewpoint, according to historian Douglas Booth, “attempts to break down the tendency in Western thought to dichotomize natural and social phenomena, and to describe and define them in terms of oppositional characteristics and neutrally opposed terms”.¹¹ In sport studies, this approach explores the spaces between oppositional poles, particularly in the empire-colony dichotomy to analyze the development of sporting cultures in postcolonial societies.¹² However, this

¹⁰ John Bale and Mike Cronin (eds). *Sport and Colonialism*. (Oxford: Berg, 2003). Although postcolonialism literally means “after colonialism”, Bale and Cronin pointed out how, “most works espousing a postcolonial approach deal with the period of colonization and imperialism (ibid, 3). This study generally follows this system of periodization.

¹¹ Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History*, (London: Routledge, 2005): 16.

¹² For a good example of how the post-binary approach is utilized to analyze the dynamics of postcolonial sport, see Arjun Appadurai, “Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Cricket,” in, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of*

specific study on Philippine basketball distinguishes itself from the current literature in post-binary theorizing by introducing a multi-dimensional feature to explore relational junctures beyond the empire-colony binary. Instead of merely refocusing on hybrid cultural forms, the objective of this historical-sociological inquiry is also to go beyond the mere examination of the exercise of power and resistance between the colonized and the colonizer to incorporate other players, related processes and their rationalities. Particularly, the project tries to come up with a comparative investigation of the development of basketball in the Philippines within the Asian context, by using similar cases and comparable processes regarding the growth of modern sports in 20th century China and Japan.

This framework specifically attempts to incorporate the history of American colonialism in the Philippines within the larger process of the “Americanization of Asia” which started in the mid-nineteenth century. Basically, the study argues that apart from the influence of the United States, the Filipinos’ engagements with Chinese and Japanese basketball teams and their rivalry as emerging Asian nations in the early 20th century also contributed to the growth of basketball in the Philippines. As such, “playing with the big boys” suggests a multi-dimensional framework. Instead of narrowing its focus on the space between oppositional entities for hybrid cultural forms, it tries to explore other range of comparisons that can give meaning for the persistence of certain colonial cultural practices and the appearance of new ones in contemporary geopolitical dynamics.

Globalization, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Also see John Bale and Mike Cronin (eds.) *Sport and Postcolonialism*, (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the efficacy of historical-sociology in looking into the development of certain social practices in relation to the larger societies wherein they are located. In addition, this approach gives due emphasis to the notion of time by looking onto the relevance of certain events beyond the immediate period, highlighting its importance as part of a larger and longer social narrative. This method is especially useful in tracing the evolution of basketball in the Philippines from a colonial game to a national pastime since it followed a broad chronological spectrum that paralleled the formation of the Philippine nation-state that wound through various points of convergence and disjuncture that essentially shaped both of their histories. The reflexivity of this research method enabled the discussion to cover a whole range of issues in different time periods without losing focus and coherence. In the postcolonial and subaltern contexts, the historical-sociological approach has also been useful in tracing the rationalities behind the existence of certain cultural practices such as basketball, that in contemporary age have appeared to be overly ambiguous or even socially irrelevant. Thus with the currently puzzling question of *Why is basketball popular in the Philippines?* the study was able to come up with a relatively substantive answer by examining how the sport developed throughout the 20th century.

Finally, this study hopes to help fill the dearth of literature in Philippine sports. Despite the significant role that it has played in shaping its history, culture, and society, this specific subfield remains a vast frontier that has largely remained unexplored. Sport, in general, reflects embedded social dynamics that are often buried under larger political and economic issues. Sports are, in some ways, microcosms of the societies in which they

are located, and a closer look into them “produces a blueprint of those important and valued behaviors that are the foundation of the larger culture in which the sport is embedded”.¹³ Thus looking into the social history of basketball will not only help to give a better understanding of the importance of basketball in the Philippines, but will also provide important insights on the overall dynamics of Philippine culture and society.

HOOPS HYSTERIA: BASKETBALL AS A HEGEMONIC SPORT CULTURE

In a research that deals with the convergence of culture and power, Markovits and Hellerman’s concept of “hegemonic sports culture” offers a pertinent framework in understanding the importance of basketball in Philippine society.¹⁴ Their emphasis on “emotional attachment”¹⁵ in evaluating the importance of a particular sport in a society articulates the “hoops hysteria” that generally characterizes the fervent and pervasive interest in basketball across the country.

Studies in recent years provide glimpses to the extent of basketball’s mass appeal. For instance, shortly before the 2005 SEA Games (Southeast Asian Games) in Manila, a survey was conducted to ask respondents to make a list of sports that the Philippine sport teams expect to win. Basketball expectedly topped the survey, emerging as the first choice among 44 percent of the respondents.¹⁶ However, what is interesting about this result is the fact that basketball was not even in the list of sports scheduled for the

¹³ Robert Sands, “Anthropology and Sport” in, Robert Sands (ed.) *Anthropology, Sport, and Culture*, (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999): 3.

¹⁴ Andrei S. Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Markovits and Hellerman, *Offside*, 10.

¹⁶ Social Weather Stations, *Social Weather Report*, August 26- Sept. 5, 2005: 100.

regional sport event. In addition, basketball, along with boxing, also finished on the top of a survey that was set to determine “which sports are Filipinos good at”. Basketball and boxing each garnered 55 percent of respondents’ votes, they were followed by billiards and bowling with 37 and 15 percent respectively, while the rest of the sports that received votes only scored in single digit.¹⁷

Table 1. Most Popular Sports in the Philippines

	Favorite Sports to Play (%) ¹⁸		Favorite Sports to Watch (%) ¹⁹		Education Dept. Ranking ²⁰	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Basketball	58	9	83	64	1	2
Volleyball	22	27	18	22	3	1
Baseball/Softball	11	8	6	8		5
Swimming	6	3	2	3		
Table Tennis	5	2	1	1		
Bowling	4	2	1	2	5	4
Tennis	4	2	5	7		6
Boxing	3	0	21	5		
Billiards	3	0	3	0		
Football/Soccer	0	0	6	2	4	
Track & Field	0	0	2	1	2	3

More studies (see Table 1) placed basketball on top of other sports as the favorite sport to play as well as favorite sport to watch, particularly among male respondents. It is the second favorite sport to play among females, although it remains as their most favorite sport to watch. Moreover, a ranking made by teachers, students, and sport specialists from different regions of the Philippines gathered similar results with basketball

¹⁷ Mahar Mangahas, “Its World Pool Time Again,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Nov 3, 2007: 9.

¹⁸ Gerardo A. Sandoval and Ricardo G. Abad, “Sports and the Filipino: A Love Affair,” *Social Weather Bulletin* Vol. 97, Nos. 3-4 (February 1997): 3-4.

¹⁹ Sandoval and Abad, “Sports and the Filipino,” 3-4.

²⁰ Janice Beran, “Physical Education and Sport in the Philippines,” in Eric Wagner’s (ed.) *Sport in Asia and Africa*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989): 147-164.

emerging in first place. It is the number one game for males and the second most popular sport among females after volleyball.

Of course, this current popularity of basketball in the Philippines does not stand unchallenged. The uproar about the recent performance of the country at the Seaba (Southeast Asian Basketball Association) Champions Cup in Jakarta in April last year shows the general displeasure of the Filipinos regarding the present state of basketball in the country. Many were disappointed that the Philippine could only finished second to the host country, Indonesia, “the very Asian squad we used to whip before”, a Manila newspaper columnist wrote. He added, “[s]omething’s seriously wrong here. Over the years, the quality of Philippine basketball has continuously failed us.”²¹ From its “shocking dethronement” at the 1966 Asian Games²² to the country’s failure to play in its recent holding in Doha (2006) because of a FIBA (*Federacion Internationalé du Basketball*) suspension²³, the country’s inability to capture the Asiad basketball championship in the past forty years has been a long-standing source of frustration for Filipino basketball fans. Moreover, this lack of success has also become the basis of incessant criticism on the overemphasis on basketball, which many thought unduly marginalizes other sports. By highlighting the importance of height in basketball, critics

²¹ Manolo Iñigo, “Basketball Boo-boo,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 15, 2008; 30.

²² The 1966 Asian Games Team was largely comprised of rookies, and was beaten by South Korea and Israel in the eliminations. They later lost to China in the consolation round and finished sixth overall. See “The Fifth Asiad in Bangkok: A Summary,” *The Filipino Athlete* Vol. 20 (January-February, 1967): 6-7. PSC Library.

²³ The suspension was meted because of the conflict between factions of the Basketball Association of the Philippines (BAP), the top basketball-governing body in the country. The conflict resulted from a disagreement between some groups in the BAP over the capability of the national team to carry the banner of the country in top international competitions.

argue that the country is just wasting time and resources in the sport and should instead focus more attention in other sports where Filipinos have greater chances of winning.

Despite this well-founded criticism, however, basketball continues to be the number one sport in the Philippines, as the statistics shown above have illustrated. However, one does not have to resort to figures to measure the popularity of basketball among the Filipinos. It is one of the most ubiquitous sports in the country; from air-conditioned arenas in Metro Manila and other major cities to makeshift hoops in small villages across the countryside basketball is played and watched by people from different walks of life. In addition, various institutions such as schools, churches, companies, and different organizations held regular basketball tournaments to celebrate the summer season, religious festivals, and Christmas holidays, among many other occasions.

PLAYING WITH THE BIG BOYS

Arguably, there's no other country that has received much questioning about its national sport than the Philippines. The lofty place of basketball in the Philippines often hangs as an object of curiosity, like the occasional makeshift hoop that surprisingly sprouts out in the middle of the road. People especially wonder how a game that is largely known for having exceptionally tall players attracts a strong following in a country where the usual physical height is fairly average. Generally, the Philippines literally fell short if the average height of its population is compared with that of the United States and Spain (see Table 2), the top two countries in international basketball competitions and, interestingly enough, the country's former colonial masters. The United States just bagged the

Olympic gold medal in basketball during the recent 2008 Olympics in Beijing. The US Team dominated all competitions except the championship game where the Spanish team played well before eventually losing, 118-107, giving them the silver medal. The bronze medal went to Argentina (the gold medal winner of the 2004 Olympics), which like the Philippines is also a former colony of Spain. Even among its perennial rivals in Asian basketball competitions, Filipinos are on average shorter than the Chinese, Japanese and South Koreans. However, the Filipino height is comparable to its Southeast Asian neighbors such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Thus it is of no surprise why the Philippines have since dominated the basketball tournaments at the SEA Games and other regional competitions.

Understanding why basketball is popular in the Philippines despite the general lack of height among Filipino players, which is important in order to excel in the sport, has always been a source of bewilderment even to those who have been observing Philippine basketball for some time. Basically, height provides an advantage in basketball more than any other sports because scoring involves putting a ball in a goal suspended ten feet above the floor. However, basketball is such a complex sport that having tall players, despite the advantage that it can give, is not an assurance of victory. Particularly, speeding up the pace of the game often exposes the limitations of tall players who generally run and move slower compared to shorter players. In fact, “small ball” is a popular basketball technique, even in the NBA, where coaches field smaller players to employ fast, high-scoring games that generally diminish the advantage of having tall players. Moreover, these “small ball” teams usually end up more popular among the fans

since a fast and high-scoring games are very exciting and, therefore more entertaining to watch.

Table 2. Average Height in the Philippines and Selected Countries

Country	Age Range	Average Height	
		Male	Female
Philippines ²⁴	20-39	163.5 cm (5'4.4")	151.8 cm (4'11.8")
United States ²⁵	20+	175.8 cm (5'9.3")	162.0 cm (5'3.8")
Spain ²⁶	21	178.0 cm (5'10")	165.0 cm (5'4.7")
Argentina ²⁷	18-19	174.5 cm (5'8.7")	161.0 cm (5'3.4")
China ²⁸	17	168.2 cm (5'6.2")	157.8 cm (5'2.2")
Japan ²⁹	17	172.2 cm (5'7.8")	158.8 cm (5'2")
South Korea ³⁰	17	173.9 cm (5'8.5")	161.1 cm (5'3.4")
Indonesia ³¹	19-23	162.4 cm (5'3.9")	151.3 cm (4'11.5")
Malaysia ³²	20+	164.7 cm (5'4.8")	153.3 cm (5'0.4")

²⁴ 6th National Nutrition Survey, Food and Nutrition Research Institute, Department of Science and Technology, 2003.

²⁵ Cynthia L. Ogden, Cheryl D. Fryar, Margaret D. Carroll and Katherine M. Flegal, "Mean Body Weight, Height, and Body Mass Index, United States 1960-2002," *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics* Vol. 347 (2004). Retrieved September 5, 2008 (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad347.pdf>).

²⁶ Isabel Camacho, *Los Niños Españoles han Crecido una media de diez centímetros en 16 años* (The Spanish Children Have Grown an Average of Ten Centimeters in 16 Years), *El Pais*, June 18, 2002. Retrieved September 5, 2008. (http://www.elpais.com/articulo/salud/ninos/espanioles/han/crecido/media/centemetros/anos/elpsalpor/20020618elpepisa_4/Tes).

²⁷ Mariana Del Pino, Luisa Bay, Horacio Lejarraga, *et al.* Peso y estatura de una muestra nacional de 1.971 adolescentes de 10 a 19 años: las referencias argentinas continúan vigentes. *Arch. Argent. Pediatr*, Vol. 103, No. 4 ISSN 0325-0075 (July/Aug 2005): 323-330. Retrieved September 5, 2008 (http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0325-00752005000400007&lng=en&nrm=iso).

²⁸ Yang XG, Li YP, Ma GS, Hu XQ, Wang JZ, Cui ZH, Wang ZH, Yu WT, Yang ZX, and Zhai FY. *Study on Weight and Height of the Chinese People and the Differences between 1992 and 2002*, (Beijing: National Institute for Nutrition and Food Safety, 2005). Retrieved September 5, 2008 (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16334998>).

²⁹ Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *Official Statistics 2005*. Retrieved September 5, 2008 (http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/19/10/07092511/007/002.xls).

³⁰ Ministry of Education, Science and Techology, *Annual Report on Student (1970-2006)*, Physical Examination Statistics, Retrieved September 5, 2008 (http://211.34.86.121:8092/nsiiu/view/stat.do?task=viewStatTbl&act=new&tblid=DT_1P12&orgid=112&path=&prds=se=Y&startprd=1970&endprd=2006&language=eng).

³¹ Youth Profile in Some Suburban Areas in East Java (Preliminary Survey of the Indonesian Youth Stature at the 50th Anniversary of Indonesia), *Folia Medica Indonesiana*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (April 2003). Retrieved September 5, 2008 (http://www.journal.unair.ac.id/detail_jurnal.php?id=1321&med=3&bid=3).

For Philippine basketball teams, however, “small ball” is not just a technique; it is something that defines their game and their identity. For example, the 1936 Olympic basketball team who are more popularly known as the “Islanders”, are often cited for using this style of play. “They were small”, a writer observed. “[B]ut they made up in speed... [for] what they lacked in height.” And with the team’s notable showing, he concluded that: “in the end the Filipinos proved that the Orientals could also vie with their Western counterpart in this young sport which later proved to be the special preserve of tall men.”³³ At the subsequent 1948 Olympics in London the Philippine basketball team was “conspicuously small in stature” that they were called the “little brown players from the Far East”. However, it was reported, again, that what they lacked in height, they made up with their speed as well as their “agility, cleverness, and dog-like tenacity”.³⁴

The use of speed to compensate for their lack of height, however, was supposed to be temporary. The Filipinos are thought to be already showing some signs of physical and social growth when the Philippine Independence Act was ratified in 1934. Following a Social Darwinist framework, there was a strong belief at that time that “height and weight

³² Lim TO, Ding LM, Zaki M, Suleiman AB, Fatimah S, Tahir A, Maimunah AH. Distribution of Body Weight, Height and Body Mass Index in a National Sample of Malaysian Adults. *Medical Journal of Malaysia* 55 (2000): 108-128. Retrieved September 5, 2008 (<http://www.crc.gov.my/publications/documents/Journal/Distribution%20of%20body%20weight,%20height%20and%20BMI%20in%20national%20sampl.pdf>).

³³ Jorge Afable, *Philippine Sports Greats*, 2.

³⁴ Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, *Minutes of the 32ND Annual General Meeting of the PAAF Board of Governors*, July 29, 1949, Rizal Memorial Coliseum; 71, UPVM.

are determined by nutrition, not genetics”³⁵, although recent scientific findings argued that both factors matter. Following an evolutionary premise, the idea was that developed nations increase their capacity to produce or import food resulting in better nutrition that in turn promotes taller, bigger, and stronger physical structures among the people. For instance, it was found out that “[i]mmediately after World War II, the average height of Japanese men and women quickly shot up several inches when they were introduced to the Western diet.”³⁶ In the same way, the Filipinos were hoping that with their country impending development, they would also improved their physical stature.

Even top Filipino sport leaders ascribed to this idea that gave them a more optimistic outlook about the prospect of sports in the Philippines, especially in basketball. During the annual meeting of the PAAF (Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation) in 1952, its president Jorge Vargas and some executive committee members pointed out how “the improvement of Philippine living condition as well as the acceleration of athletic activities among the people” has enabled the average Filipino to increase his/her height. Expectedly, the Chair of the Basketball Committee, Dionisio Calvo, was even more audacious in highlighting the Filipinos’ “imminent growth”. When asked about the status of a petition to create a limited division where only players below the height of six foot three inches can participate, he explained that the petition was not approved by FIBA (International Basketball Federation) because some countries, led by the US, find it

³⁵ Joseph Reaves, *Taking a Game: A History of Baseball in Asian*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

³⁶ Joseph Reaves, *Taking a Game*, 107.

discriminatory. He added that, “the new plan will not help the Filipinos anyway”, maintaining that:

during the last few years, a number of tall players have showed up in our local courts, and there is not telling, he said just, how tall Filipinos will become within the next three or four years. As for as, we are concerned now, Mr. Calvo concluded, a division at a height limit of 6’2”, will inevitably exclude or eliminate from our team a number of good tall players who are well above the 6’2” limit.³⁷

These Filipino sport leaders, of course, had all the reasons to be optimistic about the prospect of Philippine basketball during that time. Aside from being a regular fixture in top international basketball competitions, the Philippines had also entrenched itself in regional competitions after not getting any serious contender from other Asian countries. Fresh from a recent victory at the First Asian Games in New Delhi in 1951 where the national basketball team “won with apparent ease”³⁸, the country would later win another three consecutive Asian Games championship. Two years later, Philippines won its highest finish, and the best performance by any Asian country, so far in international basketball competitions at the 1954 World Basketball Championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. During that event, the country placed third overall and one of its players, Carlos Loyzaga, was chosen as part of the Mythical Team, the elite roster of top players in the tournament. Until now, the Philippines remains as the only Asian country to ever win a medal at the World Basketball Championships, considered as the “World Cup” of basketball; it is the most prestigious basketball tournament in the world.

³⁷ Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, *Minutes of the Thirty Fifth Annual General Meeting of the PAAF Board of Governors*, June 7, 1952, Manila Hotel: 6. UPVM.

³⁸ Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, *Minutes of the Thirty Fourth Annual General Meeting of the PAAF Board of Governors*, July 13, 1951, Rizal Memorial Coliseum: 89. UPVM.

A national sport, just as a nation, is marked by the commemoration of heroes and events that help preserve its relevance and legitimacy.³⁹ In Philippine basketball, heroes such as Carlos Loyzaga, and events like the 1954 World Basketball Championships helped sustain the sport's prominence despite the different problems and issues that come its way. The most serious of which are the Filipino's general lack of competitive height and its mediocre standing in international competitions. These heroes and events have proven that *tatangkad din ako!* as a symbol of Philippine basketball's fortitude and optimism, far from being an irrational and absurd obsession, is historically well-founded and rhetorically relevant.

However, in spite of its pertinent rationalities, it is not enough to totally attribute the origins of the popularity of basketball in the Philippines to a number of founding fathers and some watershed events. Heroes are, in some ways, mere inventions and landmark events often lose their meanings after some time. The more important aspects in understanding the basketball phenomenon in the Philippines lie not in the ideals but in the experience. Its deeper meaning rests not on heroes and events but how they are produced and reproduced as part of the everyday lives of ordinary basketball players and followers. Playing with the big boys, therefore, is not merely concern with "growth", but rather puts emphasis on the process of "growing".

³⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagine Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991).

THE PROMISE OF GROWTH:

BASKETBALL, MODERNITY, SUBALTERNITY

Ironically, apart from being an expression of the nation's self-confidence and optimism, *tatangkad din ako!* (I, too, shall be tall!) is also an oblique demonstration of one's adherence in "the promise of the foreign". This concept, which is elaborated in Vicente Rafael's recent book that carries the same title, provides an insightful analysis of the growth of nationalism during the late period of the Spanish colonial regime in the Philippines (1820s-1890s). In this particular work, Rafael pointed out how the introduction of transport, communication and other technological developments "brought the promise of the colony's transformation". The export of "goods and people while importing capital, books, newspapers, political movements, secret societies, and ideologies" ... according to Rafael, "circulated the expectation of a society other than what it had been, becoming, that is modern in its proximity to events in the metropole and the rest of the 'civilized' world".⁴⁰

This "promise of the foreign" sounded more enticing when the Philippines fell under the control of the United States after the Spanish-American War (1898) and the subsequent Philippine-American War (1899-1902). Armed with a liberal and democratic ideology, a more advanced technology, and superior economic resource, the US, as an emerging world power and a new colonial master took the effort of "modernizing" the Philippines to higher level. Through a comprehensive development plan, various infrastructure projects were implemented and programs in education, health, and other social services

⁴⁰ Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 5.

were initiated. Along with the transformations that resulted from these initiatives was the inroad of American cultural beliefs and practices, which largely remained long after the soldiers, missionaries, and other colonial workers have left. Among these new “technical” developments, which eventually have greater cultural impact was the introduction of sports, including the newly invented game of basketball.

Since the beginning of the Spanish-American War, sport has already been playing an important role in the American military structure. A new generation of officers had instituted as a vital part of the organization for its effectiveness in fighting vices, boosting morale, as well as in instilling “soldierly values” of duty, courage and patriotism.⁴¹ Eventually, the means used to control its soldiers was also proven to be effective in managing the colony. In time, American colonial officials started using sports to establish standards of behaviors, relations, and conformity. As a result, athletics and sports also became an important pedagogical tool, a means of cultivating values and practices that the colonizers deem to be acceptable in the “civilized world”; a way of imparting the “modern ways” to the “savage” natives.⁴² In fact, headlines and reports such as “baseball replaced headhunting,” the holding tug-of-war contests in lieu of tribal wars, and other similar news abound during the early 20th century US print media to portray the progress

⁴¹ Steven W. Pope, “An Army of Athletes: Playing Fields, Battlefields, and the American Military Sporting Experience”. *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1995).

⁴² See, for example James Mills, *Subaltern Sports*; Arjun Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*; Alan Kline, ‘Culture, Politics, and Baseball in the Dominican Republic.’ *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 22, No. 3, (1998): 111-130; and Brian Stoddart, ‘Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.30, No.4 (1988) 649-673.

of the Americans' effort to "uplift" the conditions in the Philippines.⁴³ Basketball, in particular, was recognized for its greater capacity in infusing discipline, leadership, and teamwork.

Apart from its pedagogical significance, "the promise of the foreign" represents the rhetorical and communicative underpinnings of colonial projects such as literature that is central in Rafael's work on the rise of Philippine nationalism. His examination of the importance of language in the "formative period" that spanned the colonial era and the subsequent rise of an independent nation-state shows how one's ability to "translate" can open up the possibilities of emancipation. In his recent work, particularly, Rafael tries to illustrate how the early Filipino nationalists' knowledge of Castilian, enabled them to speak with one another and allowed them to communicate and seek recognition from Spanish officials in Spain.⁴⁴ "[W]e can think of Filipino nationalism," Rafael suggests "as a practice of translation, here understood first as the coming into contact with the foreign and subsequently its reformation into an element of oneself."⁴⁵

⁴³ See for example, Dean Worcester, "Field Sport Among the Tribe of Northern Luzon," *National Geographic Magazine* (March 1911), Worcester Papers, BHL-UMI; O. Garfield Jones, "Athletics Helping the Filipino," *Outing*, (August 1914), RG 350-E5A-1887-37, NARA; and Shirley Povish, "This Morning," *Washington Post*, 24 January 1934; 15, RG 350-E5A-1887-52, US NARA.

⁴⁴ Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, 19.

⁴⁵ Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, 19-20.



Figure 3. The Internal Revenue Team, winner of the 1916 National Basketball Championship (Filipino Division) was shown here posing in front of the American flag. Photo reproduced from *The Filipino Athlete* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Sept. 1, 1935): 5, UPVM.

This representation of the colonial-national nexus is especially valuable to this study since it highlights the contradictory origin of the subaltern subject, a predicament that besets the history of Philippine basketball. Akin to the *illustrado's* acquisition of Castillan, learning how to play basketball allowed the Filipinos to interact with the metropole and even with other basketball players from beyond, which helped the emerging Philippine nation-state to gain international recognition. Hence, basketball is in itself a form of language, and playing the game is a process of communication that enabled the Filipinos to incorporate aspects of *Americano* as part of their own identity. A

transformation that permitted them to embody the “promise of the foreign, or more precisely, of becoming foreign associated with the experience of modernity.”⁴⁶

In a wider context, Rafael’s ideas mirror an earlier proposition laid down by Arjun Appadurai in his work on the decolonization of cricket in India.⁴⁷ Comparable to Rafael’s proposition of the link between the Filipinos’ acquisition of the colonial language and the rise of Philippine nationalism, Appadurai argues that cricket “became indigenized through a set of complex and contradictory processes that parallel the emergence of an Indian ‘nation’ from the British Empire.”⁴⁸ Just like Rafael, Appadurai also recognizes the important role of language and mass media in understanding the popularity of cricket in India. Akin to the former’s concept of “translation,” the latter described a “process of vernacularization,” which “provides a verbal repertoire that allows a large numbers of Indians to experience cricket as a linguistically familiar form, thus liberating cricket from

⁴⁶ Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, 5.

⁴⁷ Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*. Following similar concern, a number of studies were recently conducted to look, not only into cricket, but also into how other sports like martial arts, polo, and football were utilized as a venue to express local sentiments in postcolonial South Asia (Mills 2005). Writing on a similar theme from across the globe, Stoddart (1988) reported how cricket in Barbados emerged not simply as a form of colonial recreation, but also as an arena where the empire and the colony negotiated the results of cultural proselytism. Earlier, Roden (1980) examined how the success of some high school students in the game of baseball against some American sailors stationed in the port of Yokohama, enhanced the geopolitical image of Japan that was just breaking free from an unequal treaty that opened its ports to American trade. These examples shows how sport, which started as a colonial tool of political control, evolved into a means of local resistance and a medium for the expression of national identity.

⁴⁸ He observed how: “...cricket became popular in the first three decades of the 20th century,” and as the nationalist movement, particularly with Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress gathered momentum in the same period, cricket nationalism and explicitly nationalist politics as such came into contact in the ordinary lives of young Indians.”. [Interestingly, this period also saw the occasion of the nationalist movement against the American colonial regime and the emergence of basketball as a national sport in the Philippines.] See, Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*, 90, 99.

that very Englishness that first gave it its moral authority and intrigue.”⁴⁹ Generally, “translation” or “vernacularization” enabled local players to express foreign terms in their own words, integrating rationalities shaped by their own cultural contexts.

The game, as a channel and a product of vernacularization, stands like a bridge that connects the native to the foreign. This bridge affords the native players a certain degree of mobility that enables him/her to cross, get a glimpse, and briefly immersed him/herself in the strangeness and mysteries of the world of the “other”. In looking into the social role of cockfighting during the Spanish-era, social historian Filomeno Aguilar, Jr., noted a similar local strategy where the “*indios* (native Filipinos) moved back and forth between the overlapping worlds constituted by the indigenous and the colonial in a gamble that they would not be caught in either one.”⁵⁰ As the Philippines’ most popular “sport” at that time, cockfighting represented what was cricket in colonial India. Hence, cricket’s popularity in India, according to Appadurai, hinges on its ability to allow people – from players to organizers, from the ordinary fans to high-ranking government officials – the opportunity to experience, experiment, and play with the “means of modernity”.⁵¹

Evidently, “playing with modernity” can also be applied to understand the importance of basketball in the early 20th-century Philippines. Just as the emergence of cricket as a national sport in India, basketball came to prominence in a period when the general

⁴⁹ Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*, 102.

⁵⁰ Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr., *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998); 47.

⁵¹ Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*, 112.

political and social conditions allowed the larger population to have a heightened sense of agency and more opportunities for social mobility. With its origin as an American sport and as a popular collegiate game, basketball became closely associated with higher education, the urban centers (where institutions of higher learning are located), and with the bourgeoisie. In comparison, the most popular sport at that time, baseball – the timeless symbol of “pastoral America”⁵² – was more widely played in rural areas, in public elementary or secondary schools, or among working class urban dwellers.

In fact, the two decades before the Second World War, saw the long “battle of the ballgames” between baseball and basketball for supremacy over which one was going to be the most popular sport in the Philippines (see Chapter Three). While boisterous cheers greeted every basketball game in colleges and universities in Manila and other major cities, baseball held its ground in the provinces and in the long-entrenched Manila Bay Baseball League (MBBL). Notably, teams that were comprised of players from neighboring sugar plantations and manufacturing companies dominated the MBBL. Primarily due to its association with “modernity,” basketball’s popularity eventually spread from the emerging urban-based, educated class to the rest of the population in almost every corner of the country. It did not take long before basketball eventually supplanted baseball as the number one sport in the Philippines.

⁵² Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football and Basketball, and What They See When They Do*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

In India, there was no pre-existing dominant modern sport but cricket initially had to compete with hockey (India's official national sport) and football before it eventually emerged as the country's premier sport. The game initially came to prominence after it became the "unofficial instrument of state cultural policy" during the British colonial regime.⁵³ However, just like basketball in the Philippines, cricket only attracted widespread interest during the early 20th century. With a relatively liberal social environment, cricket provided players and other actors from the larger sector of the local population greater opportunities for political participation and social mobility. More generally, the game provided the viewing public a "sense of cultural literacy in a world sport (associated with the still-not-erased sense of the technological superiority of the West) and the more diffuse pleasures of association with glamour, cosmopolitanism, and national competitiveness."⁵⁴ This "cultural literacy" as a form of "enlightenment," is the result of the subaltern acquiring the capacity to "translate," to use Rafael's words, that enables him/her to understand and experience limited aspects of the world of the foreign.

Moreover, cultural literacy entails the development of a common consciousness. Following Rafael's example, a shared knowledge of the language of Castilian, for instance, enabled the *ilustrados* – the 19th-century Filipino nationalist group, to establish a sense of community and common identity even though its members came from different linguistic origins. During the American colonial regime, sports, along with education and other "development innovations" that were implemented even to the most far-flung provinces, eventually contributed to the integration of the vast archipelago into

⁵³ Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*, 93.

⁵⁴ Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*, 112.

a nation. Arguably, the emerging game of basketball, which at that time was quickly gaining a strong following around the country, became a timely symbol of national unity.

In India, pleasure of “playing with modernity” that is embedded by cricket, Appadurai described, has called upon for “a confluence of lived interests, where the producers and consumers of [the sport] can share the excitement of Indianness without its many divisive scars.”⁵⁵ Just as Indian cricket, basketball, did not only afforded the Filipinos with the chance to “play with modernity” but also expanded this opportunity to transcend various class, ethnic, religious, linguistic and geographical divisions that put the nation in a constant threat of disintegration. The shared-experience of playing and following basketball games, and especially the collective outpouring of emotion in celebrating victories and mourning defeats in international competitions, contributed to the development of a national consciousness. In this way “playing with modernity,” is synonymous with “the promise of the foreign” since they both pertain not only to the opportunity for individual citizens to experience and experiment with modernity but also for the nation itself “to play with progress,” to experiment with and experience (albeit in fleeting ways), the economic advancement and political stability that describes the overall conditions enjoyed by its colonial master or any other modern society.

At the theoretical level, Rafael and Appadurai’s works follow roughly the same trail that was pioneered by the postcolonial scholar, Homi Bhabha. His concepts of “mimicry” and “hybridity,” specifically, can provide a unique perspective in analyzing the dynamics of

⁵⁵ Appadurai, *Playing with Modernity*, 112-113.

sports in postcolonial societies. In general, “mimicry” can be useful in illustrating the receptivity of the Filipinos to the colonial effort to replicate American ideologies, knowledge, and values in the Philippines. In the contemporary context, the notion of mimicry can be applied in analyzing the case of basketball in the Philippines at two levels. First, at the institutional level, mimicry refers to how the professional basketball leagues in the Philippines try to imitate the league format and promotional techniques of the United States’ NBA (National Basketball Association). Second, at the individual level, this concept explains how a Filipino basketball player attempts to copy the plays of popular NBA stars like Michael Jordan or Kobe Bryant as their games have become largely accepted as models of excellence.

Eventually, mimicry results in “hybridity”. The “ability to translate” and the opportunity to “play with modernity”, enable the subaltern to create new spaces that allow appropriation and subversion of the colonial power. Thus hybridity “reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority”.⁵⁶ For example, basketball became a key component “of an evolving national culture, one no longer imposed by the US but searching for a [unifying sets of practices and ideals].”⁵⁷ Thus the immediate integration of basketball as part of the Filipinos’ everyday life and cultural consciousness during the American colonial era illustrates the incorporation of a “new knowledge” that enabled them to use the sport as a venue to construct and express their own identity.

⁵⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994): 114.

⁵⁷ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006): 66.

THE GAME PLAN

The study recognizes the role of history in shaping cultural phenomena. Although the main concern of the study is to understand the social significance of basketball as an important aspect of contemporary popular culture, historical facts and narratives serve as essential building blocks of this particular sociological odyssey. Thus the study relies primarily on archival data taken from different archives and libraries in the Philippines and in the United States. In the Philippines, the American Historical Collection of the Ateneo de Manila University's Rizal Library, the University of the Philippines' Vargas Museum, Main Library, and College of Human Kinetics Library, the library of the Philippine Sports Commission, and the Philippine National Library were valuable sources of information on local sports as well as on the American colonial period in the Philippines. In addition, the Social Weather Stations in Quezon City provided the current data on Philippine sports.

In the United States, the US National Archives in College Park, Maryland and the US Library of Congress was an inexhaustible source of colonial reports, personal documents of colonial administrators, early physical education books in the Philippines, and other valuable materials. Likewise, the Bancroff Library of the University of California at Berkeley and the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor also contains a sizeable collection on the colonial educational programs during the American period in the Philippines.⁵⁸ Finally, the University of Minnesota's Kautz

⁵⁸ Particularly, the Bancroff Library holds the papers and personal collection of David P. Barrows, who was Superintendent of the Bureau of Public Instruction under the American colonial government. His collection contains information on the introduction

Family YMCA Archives yielded important materials on the early twentieth century expansion of the YMCA in the Philippines, as well as in China and Japan.

Generally, the broad scope of archival sources covered in the study reflects the exploratory nature of the data collection process. The dearth of literature on sports in the Philippines and on Filipino basketball, in particular, necessitated the time-consuming effort of visiting distant archives that, in a few cases, only produced a handful of useful materials. However, the limited data on basketball, as expected, gradually decreased as the period of study progressed. From the post-independence era, for instance, numerous magazines, journals, and newspapers, which carried feature stories, intensive documentation, and regular columns on the different events and personalities surrounding Philippine basketball, are readily available. Overall, despite the huge quantity of interesting and useful information derived from the archives and libraries in the Philippines and in the United States, the large amount of time spent on archival research has prevented the researcher from getting data through other means such interviews and observations, which would have further enriched the discussion in each of the chapters.

Analytically, the study started with the aim of formulating a more factual and inclusive answer to a simple question: *Why is basketball popular in the Philippines?* The original plan was to conduct an ethnographic investigation to understand the contemporary

of physical education and modern sports in the Philippines. After his stint in the Philippines, Barrows went back to teach at the University of California, and eventually became its president from 1919-1923. Likewise, the Bentley Library contains materials from different American colonial administrators in the Philippines, including Dean Worcester (Secretary of Interior) and William Marquardt (Superintendent of the Bureau of Public Instruction), among many others.

significance of basketball as a cultural phenomenon. However, initial research has revealed the scarcity of academic works on Philippine basketball, including on its history, which makes the study more ideal for a trailblazing historical examination than a deep-probing anthropological inquiry. This dearth of literature on the origins of basketball's popularity has shifted the direction of the research project into a historical-sociological analysis of the role of sport, particularly basketball, in the American colonial regime in the Philippines.

Obviously, the challenge is how to synthesize the enormous amount of data that results from the analysis of a range of issues in a relatively long time period (1900s to 2000s) and the information that comes from the ethnographic research into a dissertation-length monograph that can be written in a one-year timeframe. To address this problem, the discussions that comprise this dissertation is presented in a series of independent *thematic* chapters rather than a grand narrative that chronicles the evolution of Philippine basketball from its beginning up to its present condition. Presenting the argument in this way enables the coverage of important issues in a long time period without necessary spreading the discussion thinly. This method is similar to the *episodic* historiography that was made popular by Vicente Rafael in his book, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*.⁵⁹ This dissertation, however, differs from Rafael's approach because each chapter is constructed around concepts such as geopolitics, postcolonialism, and globalization rather than with key historical events and social issues.

⁵⁹ Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2000).

Nevertheless, despite its seemingly fragmented structure, the dissertation tries to come up with a coherent and unified story by focusing on a fundamental *problématique* and by closely following a recurring and all-pervading conceptual theme. Although each chapter gives specific attention to different aspects and issues about basketball through the various periods in twentieth century Philippines, these series of propositions are linked together by their common objective of addressing our primary question: *Why is basketball popular in the Philippines?* In addition, the subaltern concept of “playing with the big boys” also serves as the focal point that binds the different chapters together to form a comprehensive argument.

The first chapter presents the rationale of the study and the objectives that it aspires to complete. It will also provide a brief discussion of the changing nature of the relationship between sport and society and how it is being analyzed and articulated by various scholars. Focusing on the American colonial period, Chapter Two attempts to reconstruct the beginning of Philippine basketball by tracing its location in the larger colonial dynamics through the analysis of specific policies and the prevailing ideologies and overall sentiments regarding US imperialism, and its occupation of the Philippines. It also explores the relationship between physical education and sports through several issues such as race, religion, and Philippines’ sovereignty that defines the general social condition of this particular historical period. Chapter Three examines the celebrated rivalry between baseball and basketball as the premier sporting pastime in the country from the early American colonial era up to the period shortly after the Second World War. As earlier discussed in this section, the close association of baseball with the

American as an “occupation force”, in contrast to basketball’s general image as a representation of the “benevolent America” has resulted into the decline of the former and the rise of the latter. In addition, the supremacy of Japanese teams in post-WWII Asian baseball circuit has possibly forced the Philippines to concentrate on basketball as the sport, which allows Filipinos to exercise a “comparative advantage” in regional competitions.

Moreover, Chapter Four investigates the “Hollywoodization of Hoop”, which occurred with the increasing influence of mass media and the advance of American popular culture which turned the professional and top amateur basketball scene in the Philippines into an important aspect of the local entertainment industry. It focuses on how the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA), the country’s top professional league, capitalized on its popularity as a primetime television spectacle and its celebrity-studded teams to sustain the game’s prominence in the local sports scene despite its mediocre performance in international competitions. Chapter Five provides a view of basketball from the stands. “Rooting for the Underdogs” explores the connection between sport, spectacle and subalternity by looking into how Philippine basketball is used as a metaphor to portray the predicament of many Filipinos who endures a relatively long period of colonization, marginalization, and widespread poverty. Finally, Chapter Six deals with the impact of globalization on the PBA, the top professional basketball league in the country. Particularly, it describes how the expansion of the US NBA (National Basketball Association) and the increasing popularity of some local amateur leagues have led to the

decline of the PBA, the premier professional league in the country at the turn of the millennium.

CHAPTER TWO

SPHEROID OF INFLUENCE

Basketball, Colonization, Modernity

*What need have these men to attack?
Why are men disturbed in this spectacle?
Why are they totally committed to it?
Why this useless combat? What is sport?*

- Roland Barthes¹

The word *exercise*, which in contemporary period is easily associated with the notions of physical fitness and sports training, has a fundamental link to the history of territorial expansion and colonialism. Exercise has its origin in the Latin word *exercitium*, which is derived from *exercitare*, to train; a frequentative of *exercêre*, to train, to occupy; from *ex* + *arcêre* to enclose, to hold off.² Indeed, the cultivation of the body has long been an essential aspect of warfare and militarism, systems that are essential for a society to protect its resources and to expand its economic and political influence. This etymological connection, evidently, was at its strongest during the Age of Discovery and the heights of Western colonialism when the better-trained (and better equipped) armies of the European colonial powers were able to conquer and occupy vast and distant territories in almost every part of the globe.

¹ Roland Barthes, *What is Sport?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007): 3.

² Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. Retrieved April 19, 2009 (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exercise>).

However, around the mid-nineteenth century, the word exercise started to take on a new meaning. The emergence of modern sports, their subsequent inclusion into the curriculum of the newly-established educational institutions, and their growth as popular pastimes have gradually shifted the association of the word from its traditional martial function to a more educational and ludic rationale.³ This significant change, nonetheless, did not mean that exercise, both as a practice and a concept, had become completely apolitical. On the contrary, the evolution of modern sports and its global diffusion had remained closely associated with the global dynamics of power. Particularly, in many developing countries, the development of certain sport disciplines has often been seen as one of the remnants of Western colonization.

Although “exercise” continued to be an important locus of spatial politics, the notable difference that came as a result of the shift of its connotation was in the transformation of the concept’s (and practice’s) social significance. Along with the crucial change in the importance of physical exercise from a military training regimen (e.g. calisthenics, bodybuilding) to a popular pastime (sports) was its growth as a prevalent cultural force. In the context of colonialism, the rapid spread of the interest on sport in colonial societies, along with the contribution from other factors such as the proliferation of the colonial language (e.g. English, French, Spanish), has enabled many imperial powers to retain and even increase their influence without needing much help from their armies. For instance, in his analysis of the basis of British colonial power in Sub-Saharan Africa, Andrew Apter noted how “[the] thin white line of imperial power in the colonies rested not on British

³ Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

force and fortitude alone, but on the foundations of colonial culture”. Sport is one of the cornerstone on which the foundations of colonial culture were established.⁴

In the Philippines, the history of basketball, its national pastime, has been shaped by the country’s relationship with the United States, its former colonial master. From its introduction as an exercise regimen and a leisure activity by members of the American occupation forces and YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) missionaries, basketball evolved into an imperative cultural force that was an important means to consolidate American control over the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century. The sport, along with other forms of modern athletics, also became an important pedagogical tool that was proven to be valuable in imparting the “American ways” to the local population. This valuable use of sport was highlighted by the overall tendency to present the Filipinos as “savage natives” who needed physical as well as moral and cultural training to prepare themselves for self-government.

Furthermore, the initiative of the American YMCA officials and colonial administrators in the Philippines to organize in 1913 the first international sports event in Asia allowed the US to advance its cultural influence in the region. The Far Eastern Championship Games (FECG) provided a venue for the, then, emerging superpower to showcase the progress of its new colony and present itself as a “benevolent colonizer” that is more concerned about the general welfare of the colony than in exploiting its resources. With this

⁴ Andrew Apter, ‘The Subvention of Tradition: A Genealogy of the Nigerian Durbar,’ in George Steinmetz’s *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999): 214.

method of self-promotion, the United States distinguished itself from the long-established colonial powers such as France, Netherlands, and Great Britain, which were in control of many neighboring territories that (according to the US) had largely remained backward and underdeveloped after years of exploitation and mismanagement. Finally, the FECCG allowed the colonial power to refocus the basis of Filipino nationalism from anti-colonial sentiments to regional athletic rivalries.⁵ This strategy allowed the US to further advance its self-appointed position as a mentor/coach and deflects the object of Filipino antagonism away from itself and towards the other neighboring countries, with whom, the Philippines needed to “compete” with in order to develop and gain regional economic, political, and cultural supremacy.

This chapter deals with the exercise of geopolitics and the geopolitics of exercise and their relationships in the context of colonial sport development. It examines the origins of the “national basketball culture” in the Philippines during the early period of American colonial regime. Aside from tracing the contributions of various personalities and key events, the discussion also attempts to locate Philippine basketball in the larger dynamics of colonialism and the associated discourses that articulate and criticize its rationality. The chapter argues that the current popularity of basketball across the archipelago initially came as a result of the “social engineering” initiative of the American regime in the Philippines during the early 20th century. This concept pertains to the “effort to mold, and often to restructure” their new colony according to the US colonial designs.⁶ This

⁵ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*.

⁶ Glenn A. May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

plan was couched in the glossy rhetoric of modernization, which was used by the United States to justify its occupation of the archipelago. Sport was one of the colonial initiatives that was immediately associated with being modern, which made it appealing especially to the younger generation of Filipinos. Basketball, particularly, more than the other American sports, got identified with liberal religious denominations, higher educational institutions, and the values of urbanism.

“UNFIT FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT”:

RACIAL POLITICS, PHYSICAL TRAINING, AND COLONIALISM

When pushed to explain the US government’s decision to retain the Philippines as a colony, notable American “imperialists” such as President William McKinley replied in 1900 by asserting that the Filipinos were still “unfit for self-government”.⁷ Apparently, they were not only referring to the local population’s lack of knowledge and experience in democratic governance but were also literally pointing out to some perceived “physical deficiencies” that the Filipinos needed to correct in order to effectively defend and run the nation. Particularly, “the susceptibility to illness, the high death rate, and the comparatively small amount of industry” demonstrate some of the physical reasons why the “natives” were not yet ready for independence.⁸ At a glance, the first two problems immediately fell under the realm of health and medical science while the last one pertained to a mainly cultural issue. For both problems, however, the American officials readily suggested an all-embracing solution: physical exercise and competitive sports.

⁷ Charles S. Olcott, *The Life of William McKinley*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916) 2:111. US-LOC.

⁸ Frances C. Buffington, *Physical Training for Filipinos*, (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., Publishers, 1909): vi. US-LOC.

“Certainly, nothing will go further toward building up a stronger and more physically capable Filipino manhood,” Elton Brown, the YMCA Physical Director argued, “than a good system of manly sports widely disseminated throughout the country.” He added: “So closely are exercise and hygienic training that it would be practically impossible to spread the knowledge of, [the] love of, and practice of athletic games... without at the same time teaching the Filipino youth of the land how to take care of their bodies and protect them from disease.”⁹ The introduction of sports and athletics constitute an important element in the effort to implement a comprehensive program in health and sanitation.¹⁰ However, more than its pragmatic value of promoting a healthy well-being, exercise was also recognized for its efficacy in instilling some of the indispensable civic values essential in a modern democratic society. “The self-restraint, the obedience to rules, the respect for other fellow’s rights that the athletes learns in the vigorous practice of give and take” that Brown noted,¹¹ were just some of the character attributes that the Filipinos needed to develop along with their “weak” muscles. In highlighting the importance of health science in the American colonial administration, the medical historian Warwick Anderson noted how: “By 1902, the well-ordered laboratory, more than the army camp, appeared to represent the exemplary site for modern Filipino bodies

⁹ Elwood Brown, *Annual Report of the Physical Director, 1911*: 487-488. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

¹⁰ For a discussion on American colonial health, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*.

¹¹ Elwood Brown, *Annual Report of the Physical Director, 1911*, 4.

and culture.”¹² A few years later, however, the secluded laboratory would eventually yield to the more accessible gymnasium.

Race, Athletics, Americanization

The mass physical training program, as an important part of the “Americanization” of the US colony, was initially implemented among schoolchildren since, as a superintendent of the Bureau of Public Instruction would put it, “[y]ou cannot make Americans of the adult Filipinos.”¹³ The initiative, though, was eventually expanded to include government employees, especially during the summer season when most government offices move to the colonial hill station of Baguio City.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the child-adult distinction did not seem to matter much since the entire population was viewed to have largely displayed some forms of physical and cultural immaturity. For instance, a YMCA official argued that “[t]he Filipino as a race are in the childhood of their development, and exhibit all the peculiarities, faults, and virtues of a rapidly developing adolescent boy.”¹⁵ Following a social Darwinist model, the perceived inferiority of the Filipino physique established the

¹² Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 3.

¹³ Fred W. Atkinson, ‘Education in the Philippines,’ *The Outlook* Vol. LXX (Jan-Apr 1902): 832. Personal Collection.

¹⁴ Nestled within the Cordillera Range, Baguio was built on a highly-elevated area by the American colonial government as the Philippines’ “summer capital”. Just like other hill stations in many colonies, the city was established on an area with a cool climate that were favorable to the white colonial masters who originated from temperate countries. Particularly, early US officials found the tropical heat in the Philippines “degenerative” to the health and overall well-being of white soldiers and civilians, thus Baguio was established as a place for “recuperation. See Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*.

¹⁵ Alfred Morill, *Report of Secretary-General, 1915*: 1026. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

hierarchy of difference between the backward colony and the modern metropole that was vital in underscoring the racial foundation of American colonial power.

For instance, the 1909 exercise handbook, *Physical Training for Filipinos*, highlighted how the “[t]he physical development of an Eastern tropical people differs widely than that of a Western people in the temperate zone”, and thereby suggested that, “a course in physical training for Philippine schools should be designed to meet existing conditions, and should be especially adapted to correct the physical deficiencies of the Filipinos.”¹⁶

This line was not only an affirmation of the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon race but also reflected the racialized rationalities of American expansionism that include, among others, the highly-disputed notions of “Manifest Destiny” and “White Man’s Burden”.¹⁷ Generally, the distinctive bodily attributes of the local inhabitants became an integral aspect of what Kramer would call as “the racial politics of empire”. This concept essentially described how the Americans arranged “the way in which hierarchies of difference were generated and mobilized in order to legitimate and to organize invasion, conquest, and colonial administration.”¹⁸ The Filipino physique, as a perceived inferior racial category became an important part in establishing the hierarchy of difference that was used to justify American colonialism.

¹⁶ Frances C. Buffington, *Physical Training for Filipinos*, iv. US-LOC.

¹⁷ “Manifest Destiny” surfaced in the mid-19th century during the United States’ western expansion. With its racial, class, religious, and gender connotations, it is also being used to refer to the American imperial process. See Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*. On the other hand, “White Man’s Burden,” is the famous poem by Rudyard Kipling, which is subtitled *The United States and the Philippine Islands*. It is largely interpreted as a symbol of Western racism and global supremacist ideology. See Stuart Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁸ Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 2.

More than skin color, the most underscored feature of the physical differences between the Americans and the Filipinos was height. From the battleground to the basketball court, in real as well as in symbolic terms, physical size was one of the determining measures, which distinguished the dominant from the dominated in the relationship between the US and the Philippines. This general observation follows Gems assertion on how racial basis of the “the concept of whiteness adhered not only to skin color but to intellectual and physical capacities as well.”¹⁹ For example, Dean Worcester, the colonial-era Secretary of Interior, tried to draw attention to this distinction by coming up with a highly-publicized photograph of himself towering beside a half-naked member of an indigenous community from the Philippines’ Cordillera region (see Figure 4).

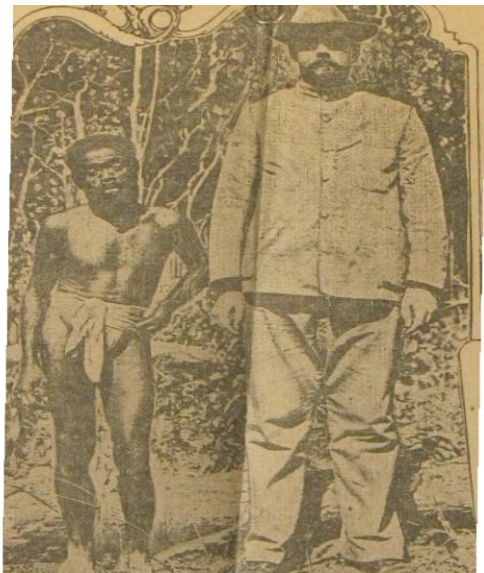


Figure 4. Photo of Dean Worcester with an indigenous Filipino. Photo reproduced from *Omaha World Herald*, (Dec. 8, 1913): n.p. Dean C. Worcester Papers, BHL-UMI.

¹⁹ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 2.

Symbolically, the picture is suggestive of the physical growth as a determinant to the amount of progress that a society can achieve. Further implying the need for the savage native to follow the lead of the white man to bring him/her from the darkness of their mountain refuge into the light of civilization and modernity. However, apart from illustrating America's "imposing power", Worcester photograph with the indigenous Filipino, was also used as part of the larger colonial discourse that presents the local people as "savages" and "wild men" by highlighting the country's indigenous population. This imperial rhetoric were proliferated through official government documents, different literary forms, and promoted through the displays of the different indigenous groups in major exhibitions, both locally and abroad.

From Tribal War to Tug-of-War

The American period (1901-1946) was noted for its effort to incorporate two areas that the previous Spanish colonial regime (1565-1898) had failed to conquer and integrate into the mainstream Filipino society. Loosely categorized as the territories of the non-Christian tribes, they were eventually put under two administrative units: the Mountain Province in the northern island of Luzon and the Moro province in the southern part of the archipelago. The relative isolation of these two areas from the rest of the population, enabled its people to maintain traditional practices that contradict with prevailing social principles and practices both in the United States and in the Philippines. The practice of slavery in Moro Province and headhunting in the Mountain Province, for instance, were often used by the American colonial regime to demonstrate the necessity to "civilized"

the non-Christian groups, as well as the rest of the population whose level of development was merely a few steps ahead of the former.



Figure 5. Americanizing the Filipino: A photo of indigenous Filipinos playing baseball in front of American and local officials. Photo reproduced from *The Literary Digest* (Nov. 20, 1915): 1049, Dean C. Worcester Papers, BHL-UMI.

Among the most notable literatures which tried to account for the Filipino “savagery” was Worcester’s *Field Sports Among the Wild Men of Northern Luzon*, which appeared in the March 1911 issue of the *National Geographic Magazine*.²⁰ The piece described one of his many field inspection trips to the communities located in the Cordillera Range, in northern Philippines, as the colonial government’s Interior Secretary. Primarily, the piece accounts for the role that modern sports had played in “taming the natives” of what was considered as largely isolated and unincorporated region. In his article, Worcester pointed out the success of the local American officials in preventing the occurrence of tribal wars and stabilizing the volatile peace and order situation in the area. Particularly,

²⁰ Dean C. Worcester, *Field Sport Among the Wild Men of Northern Luzon*.

Worcester highlighted how “[t]he effort to suppress [headhunting] has been unexpectedly successful and [it] is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.”²¹ Nevertheless, he noted how “superabundant animal spirits will inevitably find an outlet, and in this case we have tried, with a good deal of success, to direct them into less turbulent channels by teaching them American athletic games...”²² Along with the construction of roads, providing access to social services, and setting up local administrative order, the promotion of sport and athletic competitions were generally recognized as successful diversions, if not as less-violent ways of settling violent conflicts that plague the communities in the Mountain Province.

On the other end of the archipelago, the excitement and the positive values that modern sports could impart had led the Moros²³ to lay down their bolos (bladed weapons) in favor of the baseball bat.²⁴ After long years of steadfast resistance against the expansion of the Spanish colonial regime, the Filipino-Muslims have continued their resistance to colonial rule and fought to delay the advance of American power in southern Philippines. While the Philippine-American War officially ended after three years in 1902, the Moro Rebellion persisted until 1913. Despite this unfavorable social condition, modern sports were able to make some progress. For instance, a San Francisco newspaper reported a

²¹ Ibid., 221.

²² Ibid., 221.

²³ Moro refers to the Filipino-Muslims, a collection of several ethno-linguistic groups, the largest non-Christian group in the Philippines. The word was used in derogatory term by the Catholic Spanish colonizers of the archipelago in reference to shared Islamic beliefs between the groups from the southern island of Mindanao and the Moors of North Africa, who had previously conquered southern Spain.

²⁴ Walter W. Marquardt, ‘A Trip Through The Southern Islands on the S.S. Negros (July 24-August 18, 1918)’ *Inspection Trips, Bureau of Education*, 1918: 89. Walter Marquardt Papers, BHL-UMI.

story about an American teacher named Michael O'Holligan who was able to organized a good baseball team out of his students in an elementary school in the island town of Jolo. Once, O'Holligan arranged for a tournament against a team from Zamboanga, the provincial capital. After a decisive win, the players went home and were greeted at home with cheers and a big feast. At the end of the celebration, O' Holligan was made an honorary "Datu" [chieftain].²⁵

A year after the last major armed confrontation in 1913, the jurisdiction of the Moro Province was transferred to a newly instituted civilian administration and it was renamed Department of Mindanao and Sulu. The new government's apparent emphasis on education had Frank Carpenter, the new governor preoccupied in fielding teachers, just as his predecessors were busy sending off soldiers to the different districts of the vast territory.²⁶ Like in other parts of the country, physical training was also introduced as one of the basic subjects in elementary schools. This great amount of support that this initiative received was reflected in Carpenter's letter to Vernon Whitney, the District Governor of Sulu, endorsing the importance of athletics not only in imparting civic values but also as a form of social diversion for the people who were still coming to terms with American rule. He wrote:

I wish that you would give your best thought to the consideration and outlining of a scheme for athletics of a type customary or acceptable to the young men of your district, by which it may be possible to give them an outlet for their surplus physical energy and make it more easy for them to refrain from activities of lawless character.

²⁵ P.S. O' Reilly 'Filipinos Made Great Progress in Athletics,' *The Bulletin: San Francisco*, March 25, 1913: 7. RG350-E5A-1887-118 US NARA.

²⁶ Bureau of Education, 'Inclusion of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu in the Bureau of Education,' Circular No. 166, Series 1914. RG 350-E5-1887-44 US NARA.

It is not a new idea that opportunity for display of physical prowess is a prime factor, perhaps the controlling motive, for much of the lawlessness, and particularly crimes of violence, which are committed by uncivilized people. You yourself have been prominent and successful in athletics in years gone by, and I have no doubt you have already been thinking along this line.²⁷

Teachers, soldiers, and other colonial personnel, like Whitney, who went to school under the prevailing philosophy of *sit mens sana in corpore sano* [a healthy mind in a healthy body] that greatly influenced the US educational system at the turn of the 20th century, were instructed to pass on the same appreciation for sports and athletics to the Filipino students. For instance, Santa Lucia Barracks, the headquarters of the colonial Bureau of Constabulary in the Philippine capital was considered as a strategic location for spreading modern sports. It was there that the YMCA trained soldiers “on the various points necessary while they are in Manila so that when they go back to their provincial posts they will have little difficulty in getting athletics under way.”²⁸ More than the specific objective of promoting physical fitness, the colonial administrations in the non-Christian territories were evidently more preoccupied with the larger goal of stabilizing the peace and order situation among longtime rival communities. Efforts to replace village and kin loyalties with the more ideal identification with the nation started with the regular holding of sport competitions between villages and municipalities as illustrated in the story of O’ Holligan’s baseball team.

The promise and eventually, the achievements of this initiative was noted by many American officials such as Dean Worcester and David Barrows who all recognized the

²⁷ Frank W. Carpenter, Letter to Vernon L. Whitney, April 21, 1914. RG 350-E5A-1887-1158 US NARA.

²⁸ Elwood Brown, *Annual Report of the Physical Director (1911)*, 490.

role of sports in promoting national unity. For instance, a US political analyst reported how sports were “largely responsible for the breaking down of many of the barriers that have long stood in the way of unity and harmony between the different tribes, and in this respect, [the practices]... in general bid fair to play an important role in the nationalization of the Filipino people.²⁹ Thus the colonial project to promote “body-building” among the members of the non-Christian communities was also deemed as an essential foundation in the larger undertaking of “nation-building”.

Body Politic: Sport, Masculinity, Citizenship, Modernity

While sport was noted for its contribution in stabilizing the peace and order condition in the Mountain and Moro provinces, it was also proven to an effective mechanism for social diversion, particularly in helping “ameliorate any liberation sentiments” among the Christianized Filipinos whose members figured prominently in the Philippine-American War (1899-1901) and resulting anti-colonial movement.³⁰ Sport events, particularly the major inter-scholastic tournaments, provided venues for interaction and an important means to promote national unity among the majority population beset by various geographical and cultural divisions. Apart from its utility as a tool for colonial control and social integration, physical education and Western games were also, more constructively, viewed as an important tool in preparing people for a greater role in a popular democratic government.

²⁹ P.S. O’ Reilly, *Filipinos Made Great Progress in Athletics*, 7.

³⁰ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 58.

When American personnel started to embark on their effort to modernize their new colonial possession, one of their most contentious pronouncements about the local population was on the perceived lack of industry among the Filipinos.³¹ Perhaps, this observation stem from most farmers' practice of taking long lunch breaks to avoid the punishing midday heat and to compensate for waking up before sunrise to make a head start before the tropical temperature becomes unbearable. Later on, this custom suited well with the Spanish practice of taking *siesta* or afternoon nap, which was also popular among the urban dwellers. In addition, the Filipinos were also noted for their penchant for celebration, when a *fiesta* (feastday) or any other festivities could keep an individual from work for days.³² On the other hand, indolence could also be something James Scott would refer to as an "everyday form of resistance",³³ particularly against the practice of forced labor that was prevalent during the Spanish period. Nevertheless, the Americans who saw the considerable amount of time wasted on sleeping and carousing dismissively abhorred this "laziness" as generally counter-productive, one of the "traditional" practices that hindered the development of the people in the Philippines.

The elites who were supposed to lead the country to economic progress were notorious for spending large amount of time for leisure and socializing. Their *señoritos* and *señoritas* (sons and daughters) were generally considered as "spoiled brats" who were mainly shielded from doing chores and other responsibilities by the household's legions

³¹ Frances C. Buffington, *Physical Training for Filipinos*.

³² Florentino H. Hornedo, *Culture and Community in the Philippine Fiesta and Other Celebrations*, (Manila: University of Sto. Tomas Publishing House, 2000).

³³ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

of servants. Hence, when J.M. Groves, the YMCA Secretary-General of the Philippines in the early 1900s, wrote about the fulfillment of promoting physical fitness among the Filipinos, as well as “the privilege of upbuilding a whole race, teaching them to play the games for which they are hungry, and substituting for the false ideal of a gentleman as a perfumed dandy, afraid of soiling his fingers, an ideal grafted on an Oriental stock...”³⁴ Similar trend also happened in China where those who had shown interest towards sports were “largely recruits from the families of the literary class, whose ‘burning of the midnight oil’ for many centuries has rendered them, as a class, anemic and wanting in physical stamina”.³⁵ In both places, the American YMCA led the way in promoting sports and athletics, making use of these socially appealing practices as a way of addressing the cultural problem of native indolence as well as the deteriorating masculinity of the educated youth.

Along with the institution of comprehensive mass education system, the effort to promote sports and athletics was initiated to mold “modern citizens” out of the “partly civilized” Christian Filipinos. Although “as a race... [most of the local population] has been elevated above the level of other Oriental and tropical races... by three centuries of contact with European (Spanish) civilization,”³⁶ this level of development fell short of the American ideals. On the contrary, the deeply rooted Spanish influence on the country

³⁴ James M. Groves, *Report of the Secretary General, YMCA*, 1911: 476. International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

³⁵ Mike Speak, ‘China in the Modern World, 1840-1949,’ in James Riordan and Robin Jones’ (eds.) *Sport and Physical Education in China*, (London: Routledge, 1999): 70-89.

³⁶ William A. Tener, *Report of the Secretary General, Philippine YMCA*, 1908: 387. International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

was generally viewed by the most American colonial officials as an obstacle to Philippine progress due to the enduring impact, of what they would consider as, the Iberian empire's traditional and backward institutions. At best, the majority of the country's population was considered medieval, particularly when measured according to the evolutionary timeline of the American nation-state.³⁷ Thus while the mountain tribes of Luzon and the Moros remained stranded among the far-flung outcrops of savagery, the Christian Filipinos were largely viewed as a nation drifting in the vast ocean that separates the primitive from the modern societies.

To set the Filipinos towards the right direction, the American colonial regime introduced sports and athletics not only for the physical development of the local population, but also for their political growth. These activities were used to impart some of the civic values such as competition, fair play, confidence, teamwork, and discipline that were deemed to be essential in building a modern nation. The contribution of sports and athletics mainly take the form of diffusing ideas of citizenship responsibility and social equality in a country where feudal systems had thrived for centuries. In 1914, O. Garfield Jones, a former official in the Philippine Bureau of Education, wrote an interesting assessment of the impact of sports and athletics in the country, particularly highlighting their success in teaching the Filipinos how to be good citizens. He pointed out how "the future of democracy in the Philippine Islands does not depend upon the cleverness of the

³⁷ Daniel P.S. Goh, 'States of Ethnography: Colonialism, Resistance, and Cultural Transcription in Malaya and the Philippines, 1890s-1930s,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 2007): 109-142.

aristocratic class of Filipinos so much as upon the kind of everyday training in individual self-control that the mass of the people receive.”³⁸

This statement is basically a critique of the feudal patron-client relations that defined the prevalent form of political relations in the country when the Americans arrived in the archipelago at the turn of the 20th century. One of the arguments used to justify the US colonization of the archipelago was the belief that “[t]he withdrawal of America in the Philippines would result in government by a small oligarchy.”³⁹ The monopoly of power by a land-owning elites that held a large part of the population in perpetual bondage reminded the colonial rulers of the oppressive agriculture-based economy of the Southern States that came to end with the US Civil War.

Under this hierarchical relations, Jones described the common Filipino as someone “who could hardly have been called an individual at all; he was only one section of a group of relatives, “*parientes*,” who worked, ate, slept, and amused himself much as a child of twelve or fourteen years would depending on a rich uncle or cousin to look after his political affairs and loan him rice in time of need.”⁴⁰ These patron-client relations developed over time through “gifts and grants that creates debt and obligations”. The debt is often not entirely settled thus resulting in a relationship of “habitual payments so that

³⁸ O. Garfield Jones, ‘Athletics Helping the Filipino,’ *Outlook*, August 1914: 586. RG350-E5A-1887-37 US NARA.

³⁹ *Washington Post*, ‘Headhunters Drop That Pastime For Football,’ August 6, 1927: 1. RG350-E5-1887-52 US NARA.

⁴⁰ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipino*, 586.

another round of patronage (or, conversely, clientage) can be enacted in the future”.⁴¹ The debt, anyway, could never be completely repaid with any monetary or material compensation since it comes as an *utang na loob* (moral indebtedness). People who turn their back on their *utang na loob* were deemed *walang hiya* (shameless) and would often lose credibility and the respect of others.⁴² Generally, the American colonial regime abhorred this form of unequal social relation as one of the feudal remnants of the Spanish *encomienda* (labor trusteeship) system, the anti-thesis to the populist democratic government that they were trying to establish in their colony.⁴³ Jones, just like other US officials, tried to distinguished American colonial rule to that of the Spaniards by highlighting their advancement vis-à-vis the latter’s technological and political backwardness. He observed about how:

The present political heritage of the Filipinos came from the corrupt system of Spanish colonial politics; but the Philippine political traditions of the future are going to be shaped by the habits and deals of the present generation of Filipino boys and girls who are being molded in a system of public school athletics that is superior to any state-wide system of public school athletics in America.⁴⁴

Sports, with its emphasis on participation and teamwork that was used to promote the ideals of citizenship, highlighting that being part of a nation entails the fulfillment of

⁴¹ Michael Salman, *The Embarrassment of Slavery: Controversies Over Bondage and Nationalism in the American Colonial Philippines*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001): 6.

⁴² Michael Salman, *The Embarrassment of Slavery*. The classic text is Frank Lynch, ‘Social Acceptance Reconsidered,’ in Frank Lynch and Alfonso de Guzman II (eds.) *Four Readings on Philippine Values*, 4th ed., rev. and enl. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1973): 1-68.

⁴³ Ironically, the American colonial regime collaborated with the elites in their effort to consolidate their control of the Philippines, which eventually led to the retention, if not the greater accumulation of economic and political power by the oligarchs. See Benedict Anderson, ‘Cacique Democracy in the Philippines’ Ch. 9, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004): 192-226.

⁴⁴ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipinos*, 589.

certain duties and responsibilities. From a passive subject that often looked up to his/her landlord for decision-making, the people were developed to exercise their free will and to be responsible through their participation in athletics and popular ball games. This consistently fits with the colonial discourse of the “unfitness of the Filipinos for self-government”, emphasizing individual autonomy as an essential prerequisite to the larger goal of national independence.

The root of the patron-client relations in the Philippines, according to Jones, lies in the highly paternalistic structure of the Filipino family. The family was presented as a microcosm of society where the head of the family basically ruled as a dictator and as a benevolent protector. Aside from having the monopoly in decision-making, the father was also the sole provider (although women played a big role in economic production) and on whose shoulder rested the responsibility to protect the family from danger and aggression. This set-up often resulted in the marginalization of the other members of the family. Jones noted that:

Since it was only the heads of families who had to bear the brunt of competition and responsibility in the past it is not surprising that the common Filipinos should become too excited over inter-municipal baseball games.” But it is only by such contest that association based on community interest. It is only thus that leaders can be made to yield quickly to individualism. And it is only thus that leaders can be quickly taught to choose men because of their efficiency rather than because of their kinship.⁴⁵

Although, sport itself has its paternalistic tendencies, with the role of coaches and patrons as indispensable aspects in athletic competitions, players were, nonetheless, generally free once they enter the playing court. However, basketball and other modern sports were

⁴⁵ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipino*, 586.

not only used to promote people empowerment and participation but were also aimed at imparting to the country's future leaders the ways of democratic governance. First, the initial test that separates modern leaders from the traditional comes during election time. An electoral race could be likened to an athletic competition where a candidate's "fitness" for a particular government position was determined by the number of votes that s/he received from the constituent population. Just as in an athletic track race, an electoral contest should be prevailed by the rule of fair play, which the competing parties need to respect.

However, the rule of fair play should remain as the guiding principle of democratic leaders even after once they got elected. In a way, they move from being competitors (in an election) to take their new role as coaches as the responsibility of running administrative organizations fell on their shoulders. "Just how important the sense of fair play is to good government is hard to say," Jones mulled over, "but certain it is that fair play and favoritism are contradictory terms, and favoritism is the fountainhead of both graft and inefficiency."⁴⁶ Involvement in sports allows individuals to expand their affiliation and affinity from his kin or close peers to a larger team or league whose membership extend beyond the limits of their immediate community. In the same way, leaders were called on to transcend their personal social networks to construct their identities according to a more abstract association with the nation.

⁴⁶ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipino*, 589.

Nation-building compares to a sports team where individual players who do not necessarily knew each other tries to build an “imagined community”, to use Benedict Anderson’s word; contribute according to their unique skills in order to achieve a common objective. Varsity players, for instance, were chosen not according to kinship ties or other personal connections but through a meritocratic evaluation of athletic talents and other related criteria. Democratic leadership, therefore, required a sense of impartiality that would allow an elected official to avoid nepotism, one of the distinctive marks in the “traditional politics” of the Philippines that the Americans were trying to erase. Witnessing some political progress in the country toward this ideal, Jones highlighted how:

Self-governing ability in athletics has now been established, because the reactionary influence of priest and old-line politicians has been nil on the baseball field. Naturally, such progress has not been achieved in those fields where the older generation has retained control, but with the development of individual self-control, a vigorous sense of fair play, and respect for duly-constituted authority among the rising generation of Filipinos, and with the recrystallization of Philippine society upon a municipal as opposed to the relationship basis, the groundwork for real political progress is being laid in the Philippine Islands as nowhere else in the world.⁴⁷

Moreover, apart from adhering to the rules of fair competition, a modern politician should also be a good loser. A good leader should be prepared to accept the mandate of the people and respect the outcome of the election. This ideal situation seemed impossible to achieve considering that the local elections during the American colonial regime often were marred by protests and conflicts between opposing parties.⁴⁸ This “political setback” brought to mind an American official’s comment about the

⁴⁷ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipino*, 591

⁴⁸ Joseph R. Hayden, *The Philippines: A Study in National Development*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947).

impossibility of teaching the old Filipinos the new tricks that embody a modern society.⁴⁹

“In short, good losers are those who have learned the better lesson in their boyhood games, and without such training anyone is apt to be spoiled child.” Jones noted, he went to argue how: “The older generation of Filipinos will probably never learn to lose a ball game or a political contest; the younger generation not only will, but in many cases have learned it.”⁵⁰

Finally, Jones’ widely acclaimed article was, essentially, a juxtaposition of the highlighted unlikable political legacies of the Spanish rule with the early “accomplishments” of the United States’ “benevolent assimilation” project as the new colonizer of the Philippines. By demonizing Spain and by “belittling” the achievements and capabilities of the Filipino leaders, the American colonial discourse used the rising influence of sports as to demonstrate the advancement of their “civilization”. This claim to cultural primacy was then used to justify their occupation of the Philippines as a necessary “mission” to uplift the social condition in the colony. Basically, physical education and other disciplinary measures became important channels through which the American colonial government sought to transform the “little brown brothers” according to their “image”.⁵¹ On the other end, these “modern” practices became aspects of American values and culture that Filipino subjects needed to incorporate in order to “prove their fitness for self-government”.

⁴⁹ Fred W. Atkinson, *Education in the Philippines*.

⁵⁰ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipino*, 588.

⁵¹ Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image*. Also see, Allen P. Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Ballers in Bloomers: Sport and Gender Issues

While remaining largely marginalized in society, Filipino women were also exposed to various American policies and were subjected to education, health, and other social engineering initiatives. This turn of event, however, could not be directly attributed to the increasing influence in the United States of women suffrage movement and the larger awareness for the empowerment of what had long been considered as the weaker sex. The use of the female body in propagating an image of vulnerability and helplessness of the Philippines graced the pages of many newspapers and magazines during that period. These illustrations and stories were employed “to promote imperialism via the stereotypes associated with the ideal white American woman like motherhood and nurturers of civilization”.⁵²

As part of the larger representation of the Filipino as a “weak race”, the Filipino women were also subjected to “body-building”, especially the younger generation whose bodies were still easy to “mold”. Sports and athletics were introduced to them through schools, particularly to keep them alert during class periods and to promote their overall well-being. One American teacher, for instance, who was assigned in the province of Zambales, introduced basketball in response to the “almost daily complaints and excuses for absences caused by headaches and other ailments.” She was pleased with the result of her initiative, noting how:

The girls took a great interest in the game from the first and soon became very enthusiastic, insisting upon practicing every evening until a late hour. The headache excuses for absences became fewer and the girls became more active both in school and society work. This continued throughout the school year 1911-12 and [today], in a class of more than forty, the girls of this same team are the

⁵² Servando D. Halili, *Iconography of the New Empire*, 168.

healthiest in schools; their grades are higher both in industrial and academic subjects, while in all tests requiring self-control, skill of ability, they greatly outclass the non-athletic girls.⁵³

Although it was already one of the favorite sports among the American military personnel and expatriates, basketball was only officially introduced to the Filipinos through the public school system in 1910. However, the immense popularity of baseball had proven to be a challenge to the growth of the sport. Apart from a number of provinces in the Visayas, basketball did not receive much attention among male students. Nonetheless, following the popularity of the sport in women educational institutions in the United States at that period, basketball was the first sport introduced to female students in the Philippines. Girl's basketball was officially included in the inter-scholastic meets from 1911-13. It was the featured event in its inaugural season in Carnival Athletic Meet and it immediately became one of the crowd favorites in the succeeding years.⁵⁴ The extreme popularity of women basketball was noted in one town where there was a total of twenty-five girls' basketball team, and in the national school championship where it was one of the biggest attractions in the annual Manila Carnival.⁵⁵

The sight of women participating in sports, especially with their teams actively competing against other teams was a rarity at that time. It was a period when the norm

⁵³ 'What Basketball is Doing for the Girls in Zambales,' in Geronima Pecson and Mary Racelis, (eds.) *Tales of American Teachers in the Philippines*, (Manila: Carmelo and Bauermann, 1959): 191.

⁵⁴ Bureau of Education, *Athletic Handbook for the Philippine Public Schools*, (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1911). American Historical Collection, RL-ADMU.

⁵⁵ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipinos*.

was for young girls to incorporate the values and social bearing of Maria Clara⁵⁶, the socially-constructed ideal Filipino woman who was distinguished by her “prim and proper” ways. After taking notice of the increasing involvement of women in sports in the country, an American journalist wrote with enthusiasm at how:

The prejudice against allowing women to take part in athletics in the Philippines has been entirely wiped out, and today we find the girls in school playing such games as are played by young ladies in the United States. Ten years ago the ladies who played or attempted to play tennis or basketball would be ridiculed by her people. Today they are admired, and those who were strongest in their criticism are now loudest in their praise.⁵⁷

Moreover, women’s participation in basketball was seen to have greater implications beyond athletics. For instance, if the local population, as a whole, were viewed as a “weak race”, the largely marginalized Filipino women would even be weaker given that the prevailing social system generally compelled them to rely on men support and protection. With the introduction of sports, however, women were not only given the opportunity to become more visible in society but could also to gain a better physical health and improved their overall well-being. Particularly, the colonial public education official O. Garfield Jones wrote how athletics: “not only develop healthful, vigorous, self-reliant mothers for the future, but they also develop within these mothers of the future a case of fair play that is lacking among non-athletic peoples.”⁵⁸ Here, good motherhood was presented not merely as a familial responsibility, but also as a duty and an obligation of a citizen – a good example that fittingly embodies the concept of *body-*

⁵⁶ Maria Clara is the main female protagonist in Jose Rizal’s (the Philippine national hero) novel, *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) who embodies beauty, grace, simplicity, and obedience - values that were ideally set for women to follow in the Catholic-dominated Spanish Philippines. Soon, because of the strong influence of Rizal’s novel, Maria Clara’s persona was eventually taken to represent the ideal Filipino woman.

⁵⁷ P.S. O’ Reilly, *Islanders Show Their Calibers in the Olympiad*, 7.

⁵⁸ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipinos*, 588.

building for nation-building. Furthermore, Jones went on further, saying how: “This sense of fair play will not only make better citizens out of these girls, should they be given the right to take part in the government, but also it will enable them to hand down this sense of fair play to their children more successfully than the less athletic mothers of Europe and America can do it.”⁵⁹ Apart from molding women for citizenship, they were even more valued for their role and responsibility to mold their children into good citizens. Thus, the social engineering mission was basically being passed on from the colonial administrators to the local population particularly through the mothers; and more generally via their new democratic leaders and enlightened citizens.



Figure 6. A 1910 postcard showing a girl’s basketball match in Dagupan, northern Philippines. [online] Retrieved May 12, 2008. (<http://freepages.school-alumni.rootsweb.ancestry.com/dickbolt/Dagupan1910BasketballGirls.jpg>).

⁵⁹ O. Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipinos*, 588-589.

The increasing popularity of girl's basketball, however, had alarmed a number of conservative groups who saw the rigorous sport as an inappropriate practice for the young Filipino women. For instance, one of the subject of contention was the use of bloomers (long baggy pants) in basketball competitions, which became a cause of concern among those who believed that women should not wear manly attires. As a compromise, the Bureau of Education advised public school officials that, "athletic suits for girls include skirts over bloomers". With the directive, the agency "believed that both girls and parents will be better pleased with this combination than with bloomers alone".⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the change in regulation came a little too late since at that time women basketball was already limited to local and provincial interscholastic meets. The event was earlier eliminated from the national championship tournaments, apparently due to the prevailing public opinion against its appropriateness as a women's sport.⁶¹ The game was deemed too strenuous and rough for a largely conservative population who believes that women should exercise physical restraint and gracefulness. Eventually, indoor baseball (softball) "has rapidly gained in popularity and has practically crowded out basket ball as the girl's game." Likewise, volleyball has also attracted an increasing interest among women and, after some time, it also superseded indoor baseball as the most popular women sport in the country.⁶²

⁶⁰ Bureau of Education, General Instructions, No. 29, Series of 1918, (July 17, 1918) RG350-E5-2618-90 US NARA.

⁶¹ Bureau of Education, 'Recommendations of the Superintendents' Committee on Physical Training,' Circular No. 90, Series of 1914. July 27, 1914. RG350-E5-1887-39.

⁶² Frank L. Crone, Director of Education, Letter to the Department of Recreation, Russell Sage Foundation, May 19, 1916; 3. RG350-E5-1887-1216.

FROM EVANGELIZATION TO EXERCISE INSTRUCTION

After more than a decade of exposure to American athletics and sports, David Barrows, the first director of the US colonial government's Bureau of Public Instruction, wrote in 1914 about their impact on the local population.

The physique of the Filipino is also being modified for the better. The race is physically small, but agile, athletic, and comely. The schools have introduced everywhere the games of ball and athletic sports of America to the notable *moral* benefit of the population. [italics mine]⁶³

Quite interestingly, Barrows' assessment was different from the others that were previously discussed since it highlighted the less touted "moral" impact of athletics during the American colonial regime in the Philippines. More recently, Gerald Gems in his seminal work *The Athletic Crusade*, also wrote about how physical education and sports were generally introduced in the Philippines by the American colonizers to fulfill the "moral imperative to bring civilization, technology, and a particular brand of the Christian religion [Protestantism] to those deemed to be lower on the Social Darwinism ladder".⁶⁴ Indeed, sports and colonialism were not only politically linked they were also bound by their embedded moral impetus.

Clearly, no other American institution during that period would embody the principles of muscular Christianity than the YMCA. The organization started sending Protestant missionaries to the Philippines, as well as to other parts of Asia in late 19th-century. However, as evangelizers they were more successful in spreading the gospel of modern sports than in propagating Christianity. Two YMCA missionaries, Charles Glunx and

⁶³ David P. Barrows, *A Decade of American Government in the Philippines, 1903-1913*, (New York: New World Book Co. 1914): 61. David P. Barrows Papers, BL-UCB.

⁶⁴ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 47.

Frank Jackson, arrived with the US troops sent to occupy the Philippines in August 14, 1898 after the Spanish-American War ended. They were given the task of “keeping the occupation force preoccupied”, setting up a literary and debating club, baseball matches, and other activities to keep the American soldiers from vices and other “temptations”. After the end of the subsequent Philippine-American War in 1902 and the establishment of a civilian colonial government, YMCA started to expand their services to the civilian white population in the city.⁶⁵ Thus, unlike in their other missions in Asia where they immediately started working with the local population, the Philippine YMCA was, for a long time, solely concerned with the affairs of the American and European military personnel and expatriates in Manila.

However, by the mid-1910s, the number of American military and administrative personnel had significantly dwindled because of the “Filipinization” of the colonial bureaucracy. In 1914, for instance, a YMCA official lamented at the thought of how “*despididas* (farewell parties) are the most frequently announced functions”⁶⁶ during the most part of the year. This turn of event, nonetheless, allowed the association to branch out and start catering to the local population. The opening of the Filipino Branch on January 1, 1915 was heralded as a milestone event for the YMCA that “marked the

⁶⁵ James M. Groves, *Report of the Secretary General, 1912*: 1074. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

⁶⁶ H.C. Fraser, *Report of the Secretary-General, 1914*: 930. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

entrance of another race – the Malay – into this world brotherhood”.⁶⁷ After a year, the new branch was seen to be doing quite exceptionally well, particularly its Physical Department, which the Philippine YMCA Secretary-General E. Stanton Turner, specially mentioned as their “most popular department”.⁶⁸



Figure 7. Early 20th century Philippine YMCA personnel. Elwood Brown is seated with an ink mark. Courtesy of the Kauts Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

It has been widely regarded that the Spanish conquest of the Philippines was achieved through *the sword and the cross*, highlighting the equal importance of military force as well as the cultural influence of the Catholic religion in the process of colonization. In the case of the Americans, it can be argued that their colonial power rested on the efficacy of *the rifle and the baseball bat*. Essentially, physical education and sports were used not only to mold the body, but the spirit as well. Their eventual growth as cultural phenomena shaped the education, health, and leisure systems and affected various other

⁶⁷ James M. Groves, *Report of the Secretary General, 1915*: 1. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

⁶⁸ E. Stanton Turner, *Report of the Secretary General, 1916*: 1074. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

fields helped consolidate the power and influence of the American colonial regime in the country. In fact, the introduction of sports, particularly as part of its mass education program was one of the examples used by the US to distinguished itself from Spain, which earlier held control over the Philippines. Particularly, the largely Protestant Americans would present themselves as more liberal and progressive compared to the backward and conservative Spanish Catholics through the ideals of “muscular Christianity,” a Christian movement that stressed the need for energetic activism.⁶⁹ For instance, Pedro Villanueva, a Filipino educator who was associated with the YMCA, criticized the limited appreciation for physical exercise before the American period, pointing out how children “were made to see the folly of spending so much energy running around the house in some form of tag game. This was particularly true during Spanish [period],” he added, when “in many instances children in church schools during that time were punished with ‘no play’ ban”.⁷⁰

Hence, when the Catholic hierarchy in Manila started planning to set up a facility similar to the YMCA (a complex of dormitories, swimming pool, and athletic facilities now called the Pope Pious XII Catholic Center) as a respond to what they saw as the alarming increase of the Protestant organization, the plan was immediately downplayed by the YMCA officials. Secretary-General E. Stanton Turner, for instance, commented: “It is my candid opinion that they will be unsuccessful in their campaign if they attempt to raise money for this building among the Filipinos. The [Catholic] priesthood has been too

⁶⁹ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sport in Protestant America, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Pedro D. Villanueva, *History, Development, and Progress of Physical Education in the Philippines*, Bachelors Thesis, YMCA College, Chicago, 1922. BHL-UMI.

greedy, too immoral, and too medieval in thought to be able to raise 200,000 [Philippine pesos].”⁷¹ Although Protestantism eventually failed to gain some significant ground against the dominant Roman Catholic Church, the YMCA, nonetheless, played an important role in the formation of sports and athletics in the country during the first half of the 20th century.

Even before the Filipino Branch was fully established in 1915, the YMCA through its American-European Branch was already contributing to the development of sports and athletics in the country. Most recognizably, Elwood S. Brown, the first Physical Director of the Philippine YMCA who arrived in Manila in 1910, had contributed enormously in training local instructors, producing manuals, and in setting up the Philippine Amateur Athletic Association that he is widely considered as “The Father of Modern Sports” in the country. He pioneered the promotion of the widespread practice of sport through his “play for all” program, which promoted physical education in the public schools around the country.⁷² From 1911-1917, Brown was also the Director of Athletics for the annual Manila Carnival where the athletic contests were one of the highlight events. Finally, he played a prominent role in the expansion of the Carnival athletic contests into a regional tournament involving other Asian countries. In 1913, he was instrumental in bringing in participants from China and Japan for the inaugural Far Eastern Championship Games (FECG) in Manila. The FECG was proven to a crucial event in the effort of the American

⁷¹ E. Stanton Turner, *Report of the Secretary General, 1916*: 1078. Philippine YMCA, International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UMN.

⁷² YMCA, *Elwood Brown*, Unpublished Biography, May 1922. Elwood Brown Papers, YMCA-UMN.

colonial regime to promote its “achievements” in the Philippines to the other countries in the region and to the whole world.

PLAY AND DISPLAY: SPORTS EVENTS AS A COLONIAL SPECTACLES

In a modest opening ceremony, William Cameron Forbes, the American Governor-General of the Philippines, stood on a makeshift stage in Manila’s Carnival Grounds to officially commence the First Far Eastern Championship Games. Dubbed, as the “Olympics of the Orient”, the event was the pioneering regional multi-sports competition that took place in the Philippine capital from February 1-9, 1913. Overall, around 130 athletes from China, Japan, and the Philippines participated in various sport tournaments that were witnessed by over 150,000 spectators.⁷³ In general, the organization of the FECCG, according to Gems “had two aims: to bring Asia into the modern world (as defined by Anglos), and to assimilate Filipino tribes in a focused nationalism against foreign opponents.”⁷⁴ Between these two goals, however, was the grander aim of the international promotion of the achievements of the American colonial regime in the Philippines through the athletic achievements of the Filipinos.

Aside from being the highest official of the host country, Governor-General Forbes – an avid polo player and sports patron – was also the president of the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation (PAAF), the main organizer of the FECCG. His opening speech highlighted the importance of the occasion as the harbinger of the development of sports

⁷³ Frank R. White, Education Report, 1913, *US Department of Interior, Education in the Territories and Outlying Possessions*. 658-659. RG 350-E5-117-73, US NARA.

⁷⁴ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 60.

in the region. This line captured the main point of his message, he said: “I hope that all your contests will be carried on in the spirit of fair play, which in years may govern your conduct in business and other vocations of grown-ups.”⁷⁵ Although he was merely trying to underscore the importance of athletics in imparting “modern values” to the throngs of young delegates who were mostly comprised of students, his remark could also be taken as a condescending advice to the three “young” nations that the athletes were representing.



Figure 8. The official logo of the Far Eastern Championship Games. Logo reproduced from the Official Program of the Second Far Eastern Championship Games, Shanghai, 1915, YMCA-UMN.

To call China, Japan, and even the Philippines a young country may be problematic. However, the first decades of the 20th century was a period of “rebirths” that saw a wave of crucial economic, political and cultural changes swept across much of the region. In 1911, China evolved from a long-established imperial power into a fledging republic, while the end of the Meiji era in 1912 ushered in the “Taisho Democracy” period that brought crucial transformations in Japanese society. The Philippines, itself, was getting

⁷⁵ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 23.

ready for the “Filipinization” of the government bureaucracy that started roughly a year after the event.⁷⁶ Hence, Forbes’ message on the instructive significance of sports appropriately fits the kind of advice that the emerging republics who, at that time, were still getting acquainted to the workings of a democratic government.

Indeed, athletics played an important role in the process of nation-building, both in the Republican China and Taisho Japan. For instance, it has been noted, that “sport did not only provided the Republican Chinese opportunities to incorporate ‘Western’ and ‘modern’ practices but it also provided an alternative practice and discourse against the oppressive ruling regime and tradition.”⁷⁷ This mirrored the case in the American-ruled Philippines when sport was also used to distinguish the US regime from the earlier Spanish colonial administration, which was largely presented as “corrupt and backward”. Building on the foundation that was started by the YMCA when they arrived in China towards the end of the 19th century, “the Republican government continued to use sports in its efforts to create a modern nation-state.”⁷⁸ The same process also happened in Taisho Japan during that period when “the Ministry of Education was wholeheartedly supportive of the diffusion of modern sports in the schools.”⁷⁹ The parallelism between the principles of “muscular Christianity” with the time-honored ethos of the *bushido*

⁷⁶ Lou Antolihao, ‘The Far Eastern Games and the Formation of Asian Identity in the Asia-Pacific during the Early Twentieth Century,’ in Ding Junjie and Luo Qing (eds.), *Asian Communication and Media Studies: Sports, Globalization, Communication*, (Beijing: Asia Media Research Center, 2007).

⁷⁷ Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004): 12.

⁷⁸ Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 50.

⁷⁹ Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001): 133.

(discipline), allowed for the assimilation of American sports, such as baseball, as something modern yet traditional.

Moreover, the message of Governor-General Forbes could also refer to his opinion on the importance of building of a favorable relationship among the participating countries. The 1913 FECG was, perhaps, the first occasion where delegates from a number of Asian countries were able to come together. Thus Forbes' advice to play the games in the "spirit of fair play," underscored the importance of the pioneering regional sporting event as a foundation in establishing goodwill and a venue for constructing a positive relationship among the nations in the Asian region. For instance, a local newspaper noted how:

The Far Eastern Olympiad is quite the most significant event that has touched Oriental peoples in united action. They have never met before for united action on any other basis than athletics. The Olympiad is democracy in itself... The Far Eastern Olympiad is the outward manifestation of the spirit of younger generation. The "effete, effulgent East" of the poets is passing away and the rise of the common man and the solidarity of nations is coming apace.⁸⁰

Aside from the significance of the First FECG in regional politics, the event was primarily held to put the spotlight on the United States. As part of the renowned Manila Carnival, the sporting spectacle was instituted to display the progress of the country as a crown achievement of the American colonial rule. In contrast to the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis, Missouri when "the Americans were using the islands' non-Christian peoples to cynically misrepresent Filipinos on the whole as savages requiring indefinite colonial rule",⁸¹ the First FECG featured the Philippines as the model "showcase of democracy"

⁸⁰ "The New Olympian," *Philippine Free Press*, (Feb. 1, 1913): 1. Also see Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 22.

⁸¹ Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 288-249. For more details on the athletic competitions involving members of Filipino indigenous communities during the St. Louis

in Asia.⁸² Just like their success in agriculture and industrial production, the victory of the Filipinos in the playing field represented their attainment in assimilating the lessons that they have learned through the “American tutelage”. Moreover, sport events such as the FECG “also enabled the Americans to channel the Filipino’s nationalism into athletic rivalries,” Gerald Gems noted. He also added that baseball, in particular, “offered a common denominator for competitive supremacy as Japanese aspirants challenged the Filipino protégés of the US.”⁸³ Reminiscent of the proxy wars several decades later, the Filipinos were essentially used to promote the international standing and political influence of the Americans in the region.

After about a week of competition, the Philippines won the overall championship, primarily because of the size of its delegation as the host country. As a result, the United States expressed much appreciation and pride on the athletic achievement of its protégé. On the other hand, the Filipinos were not to be left behind in the celebration and immediately appropriated the commendable performance of its athletes as a national victory. Shortly after the game, an American magazine noted how the success of the First FECG contributed to the development of “national self-consciousness among the Filipinos. Their baseball teams have competed with the Japanese teams for several years, and in February of last year a picked team of Filipinos won the first Oriental Olympics,

Olympics, see Gerald Gems, “Anthropology Days, the Construction of Whiteness, and American Imperialism in the Philippines,” in Susan Brownell (ed.) *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2008): 189-216.

⁸² E. San Juan, Jr. *After Colonialism*, 66.

⁸³ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 56.

defeating strong teams of baseball and track athletes from both Japan and China.”⁸⁴ It gave an emphasis on the crucial role of regional competition in the construction of the “other”. This distinction provided the boundaries of national identity that was further reinforced during the competitions by the display of each country’s flag, athletic uniforms, and other symbols.

Finally, apart from its many trailblazing achievements, the First FECG was also significant as a watershed in the development of Philippine basketball. The national team’s success in the basketball tournament stimulated the initial interest of the Filipinos for the game. Afterwards, the Philippines dominated the basketball tournaments at the Far Eastern Championship Games where it won nine out of ten championships until the FECG’s last staging, also in Manila, in 1934. This series of victories allowed basketball to rise as the premier sport in the country as the next chapter will demonstrate.

⁸⁴ Garfield Jones, *Athletics Helping the Filipinos*, 591.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM BASEBALL COLONY TO BASKETBALL REPUBLIC

Postcolonial Transition and the Making of a National Sport

“[T]he games people play are as valid a barometer of any culture as politics, religion, economics, or history. Inversely, then, so too,” Joseph Reaves argues, “are the games people refuse to play.”¹ Just as history in general, much of the works on the history of sports deals with the victors; the one or the few other hegemonic sport practices, which over time prevailed over other athletic fields to emerge as the favorite sporting pastimes. The emergence of a national sporting culture, according to Markovitz and Hellerman starts with the contest in filling in the society’s “sport space”. They present this concept as something that “denotes a qualitative dimension of cultural construction and group contestation that reflect power relationship in society at large, and in sport in particular.”² Indeed, competitive sports were, in a way, competing among themselves for public attention and support that determines their position in a society’s sporting hierarchy. More significantly, the crucial period of “competition”, when the most popular sports separate itself/themselves from those that eventually faded into oblivion or were relegated into amateur minor leagues, offer distinctive and valuable insights into the relationship between sports and larger societal dynamics where they are located.

¹ Joseph A. Reaves, *Taking in a Game*, 1.

² Markoviz and Hellerman, *Offside*, 15.

Particularly, the factors that determined which among the sports end up as winners or losers are also shaped by the process of nation-building, within which the widespread following of a particular sport becomes an important instrument in fostering a common interest, a mode of collective self-expression, and a symbol of national identity. In colonial/postcolonial societies, the rise and decline of modern sports that were largely introduced by the imperial power, often point both to the process of assimilation or rejection, or to certain strategies between these polar extremes that the colony employed to construct its own distinctive national culture.

For example, the surging popularity of baseball in Cuba in the late 19th century came as a form of opposition to Spanish colonialism after Cuban students and expatriates in the United States introduced the American game when they went back to their home country. It eventually replaced bullfighting, the popular public spectacle that was brought in by their Iberian colonizer, as the Caribbean nation's favorite pastime.³ In the Philippines, a former Spanish colony like Cuba, baseball also played an important role in shaping the emergence of a new nation. Although both countries fell under US rule after the emerging superpower defeated the fading Iberian empire in the 1898 Spanish-American War, Cuba was given independence three years later while the Americans held on to the Philippines until 1946. During this period, the American colonial regime promoted baseball in order to gain public interest and to curb the deeply-entrenched influence of Spanish culture in the archipelago. Just as its role in eliminating the popular public spectacle of bullfighting in Cuba, baseball was similarly lauded for replacing the barbaric

³ Louis A. Perez, 'Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898,' *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sept. 1994): 493-517.

game of cockfighting that was widely practiced around the archipelago during the Spanish colonial period. However, after a brief period of prominence, the widespread popularity of baseball in the Philippines gradually waned because of declining public interest, and a number of other more specific reasons that would be extensively discussed in the succeeding section. Eventually, the limited growth of the sport was overtaken by the rapidly expanding influence of basketball that was primarily fueled by its impression as the “modern game”. Was the Filipinos’ rejection of American baseball an expression of nationalist sentiment that was similar to the opposition to Spanish bullfighting in late 19th century Cuba? Not quite, as several scholars would suggest, especially since the sport that the Filipinos chose to replace baseball was a sport that was invented in the United States.⁴

This paper looks into the development of a national sporting culture in the Philippines from the American period to the first decade after its independence (1910s-1960s), focusing on the overall trend that shows the decline of baseball and the rise of basketball as the premier sport in the country. The displacement of diamond fields with the hardcourt and makeshift hoops in spite of the former’s entrenchment as the pioneering sporting spectacle, illustrates how a society’s sports space “is not ‘filled’ simply on a first-come, first-served basis, but rather disputed and contested by social groups and actors with particular sets of interests.”⁵ What are the reasons behind the prominence of baseball in the early years of the American colonial rule? What are the factors that

⁴ See, for instance, Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*; and Joseph Reaves, *Taking a Game*.

⁵ Markovitz and Hellerman, *Offside*, 15.

contributed to its decline? What was behind the phenomenal rise of basketball and how did it surpass the overall popularity and influence of baseball? How can the issues surrounding the “competition” between baseball and basketball help us to understand the political and cultural dynamics of Philippine-American relations? How is this crucial moments in the country’s sports history related to the larger history of the Filipino nation? How far does this turn of event reflect the contours of international politics in the region during that period? These are just some of the questions that this chapter tries to answer by taking a closer look into the complex relations between imperialist sport cultures and the emergence of national cultural consciousness (cultural imperialism *vis-à-vis* national identity), and their various points of convergence and disjunctures. Basically, the discussion attempts to circuitously address our main question: *Why is basketball popular in the Philippines?* by examining the reasons why other sports, specifically baseball (the former favorite pastime), failed to attract the kind of attention that it received during the early 20th century.

THE RISE AND FALL OF BASEBALL

After gaining a foothold in Manila and the surrounding provinces with a series of decisive victories in the early period of the Philippine-American War in 1899, US forces swiftly moved outside the capital to establish control over the rest of the islands. In Cebu City, the American soldiers startled the local population by turning a hallowed convent into a horse stable for the Army’s cavalry regiment. Its spacious front lawn, the Recollect Plaza, was renamed Plaza Washington and was utilized for military exercises and

baseball games.⁶ Although this incident simply marked the transition of power from the Spanish to the Americans, the occupation of the friar residence and its sprawling *plaza* (public square) had a more profound significance than the take over of the nearby Casa Real (Government House), since during the friar-dominated Spanish regime, those who lived in the convent held relatively greater power than those colonial administrators who took office at the government building.

Moreover, the “desecration” of its grounds represented the triumph of the new forms of public spectacles (military exercises and baseball games) over the primacy of Catholic religious activities during the Spanish era. Hence, the holding of marches and ballgames in the convent’s plaza stood for the transfer of power from the Spaniards to the Americans. Casting more light into the relationship between sports and cultural politics, this episode mirrored a similar event in China almost ten years later when the area around the Temple of Heaven was utilized as a venue for the Second National Games. It was noted that the blatant “untraditional use of this area as a sports field – reminding observers of the new primacy of Western culture all around the world”.⁷ In the case of Cebu City’s Plaza Washington,⁸ its use for military exercises baseball games was, in a way, a symbolic display of the United States’ supremacy over its new colonial possession.

⁶ Resil B. Mojares, *The War Against the Americans: Resistance and Collaboration in Cebu, 1899-1906*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999): 22, 152, 211.

⁷ Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China*, 130-131. Also see Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*.

⁸ After the area was renamed Plaza Washington, it was later changed to Plaza Warwick to honor an American military officer who died in combat in a neighboring island. After Philippine independence, however, the public square was called Freedom Park, a name that remained until today. See Resil Mojares, *The War Against the Americans*.

Eventually, baseball attracted a sort of a “religious following”, which challenged the power of the Church as the main proponent for most local public congregations. This turn of event was seen as a major achievement by the Americans who largely regarded the influential Catholic religion both as a representation of the cultural status quo and of the “traditional structures” that the new colonial regime was trying to topple. The impact of this social transition was observed when increasingly, Sunday rituals were hampered by a decrease in attendance due to the weekend double-header games that drew thousands of people to the ballparks.⁹ Thus, early 20th century writers of American colonialism in the Philippines such as O. Garfield Jones, William Freer, and David Barrows considered the rapid diffusion of baseball across the archipelago as a demonstration of the success of American conquest and colonial administration, as well as an indication of the deepening cultural influence of the US in the Philippines.

The rapid diffusion of baseball had swept through the entire archipelago was more like a gusty storm than a gentle wind of change. As early as 1901, the first organized tournament was already established even with the Philippine-American War still raging in different parts of the country, including around the capital city’s immediate premises. Named Manila Baseball League, it was an amateur tournament comprised of US soldiers and other colonial personnel. Still, the league remained almost exclusively American and

⁹ H.C. Fraser, *Report of the Secretary-General*, 1911: 481. International Division/Foreign Work Administrative and Program Records, YMCA-UML.

it was not until 1912 when the first All-Filipino Team was included.¹⁰ The participation of the local population, however, was more evident at the scholastic level where baseball competitions became popular spectacles even in far-flung provinces.



Figure 9. A baseball match during the First Far Eastern Games in Manila in 1913. Alfred H. Swan Photograph Collection, Kauts Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

In 1906, an American teacher who was assigned in a remote town in northern Luzon, reported how “[o]f late years baseball is played, and one of the most encouraging sign of progress in the Islands is the readiness with which the young boys take to this game”. In Baguio City, he observed how children developed a “baseball language” by interspersing English with their local dialect.¹¹ The oldest inter-scholastic athletic organization in the

¹⁰ Regino Ylanan and Carmen Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*, (Manila: self-published, 1965).

¹¹ William B. Freer, *The Philippine Experience of an American Teacher*, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1906): 273, 286.

Philippines, however, was set up in the Bicol peninsula, located on the southern tip of the main island of Luzon. Named as the Southern Luzon Athletic Association, it was organized in 1904 primarily to run baseball competitions among the provinces in the region. After a few years, when the “Philippine Interscholastic Meet” was instituted as part of the First Manila Carnival in 1908, baseball became one of the featured attractions and easily the most popular among the spectators.¹² Thus, for about a decade, from the arrival of the American troops in 1898 to the first national inter-scholastic championship competition in 1908, baseball had evolved from a little known colonial game to a national sporting spectacle.

Among the early notable local teams was the San Mateo High School, which represented the province of Rizal at the Carnival Athletic Meet in 1912.¹³ Although, they eventually lost to a powerhouse team from Manila High School, the team caught the admiration of the local fans for their skills and determination. However, they started to get public attention even before the Carnival games when the previous year, the secondary school squad beat a beastly team of American soldiers at their base in Fort McKinley, three times in five games. The team’s success mirrored the victory of the Tokyo First Higher School (Tokyo Ichiko) against a team of American sailors and expatriates from Yokohama.¹⁴ This event became a celebrated episode in the history of Japanese baseball as a symbol of emancipation against the increasing influence of the United States during

¹² Bureau of Education, *Athletic Handbook for the Philippine Public Schools*.

¹³ Luis Santiago, ‘The Organization of the San Mateo Baseball Team,’ *The Teachers’ Assembly Herald*, Vol. V, No. 26 (1912): 142-143. RG350-E5A-15351-17 US NARA.

¹⁴ Donald Roden, ‘Baseball and the Quest for National Dignity in Meiji Japan,’ *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 3, (June 1980): 511-534.

the late 19th century Japan. As a result, the victory of Tokyo Ichiko against the Americans has been regarded as the origin of the game's prominent position as the country's national pastime. Unlike the Tokyo Ichiko team, however, the symbolic significance of the San Mateo High School team hardly stirred any nationalist sentiments, neither did it served as an inspiration for the long-term viability of baseball as the most popular sport in the Philippines.

Nevertheless, after over a decade of US rule, America's favorite pastime had already evolved as the Philippines' premier sport. In his attempt to give a comprehensive picture of the influence of baseball in the country, a Californian journalist wrote in 1913: "Over all, the archipelago, from the [headhunters'] village in the mountains to the fishermen's barrio on the coast, baseball diamonds have been laid out and baseball is being played."¹⁵ After learning to master America's favorite game, the Filipinos eventually started to attract attention from the United States and elsewhere through baseball. By 1910s professional players from the major leagues in the United States had on several occasions, visited the country for match ups against Filipino teams. In turn, an All-Filipino Team embarked on an extended trip in 1913 to play a series of games in Japan and the United States. In 1926, a professional tournament was created after the Philippine Baseball League gave up its amateur status. In addition, several amateur leagues, such as the Industrial League, the Independent League, and the Manila Bay Baseball League, were organized to promote the game.¹⁶

¹⁵ P.S. O' Reilly, *Islanders Show Their Calibers in the Olympiad*, 7.

¹⁶ Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*.

The biggest event ever in Philippine baseball came twenty years later when George Hermann “Babe” Ruth, arguably the greatest baseball player of all time, came to Manila in 1934.¹⁷ Ruth arrived with a group of other top professional baseball players from America such as Jimmie Foxx, Lefty Gomez, and Lou Gehrig to play a couple of exhibition games against a selection of local teams. After a tightly scheduled series, the Big Leaguers won all their matches against the star-struck Filipino players. This visit of some of the major stars in the American major league easily became one of the most cherished events in the history of baseball in the Philippines.

Although the Big Leaguers’ visit was proven to be a huge promotional and financial success, the tremendous hype that surrounded the event, unfortunately, contradicted the overall decline of baseball that was initially observed during that time. Towards the mid-1930s, the deterioration of the quality of the game in local competitions and decreasing interest of the fans was already noted, especially at the grassroots level. Generally, the decline was blamed on the lack of competent coaches resulting from the exodus of American teachers.¹⁸ Apparently, the presence of American teachers and coaches in the country had resulted in a colonial dependency rather than serving as a foundation for the establishment of a viable national baseball program. In February 1940, a report on the country’s top sporting magazine, *The Filipino Athlete*, noted how an American high school principal’s skepticism about his initial observation about the decline of baseball

¹⁷ Thomas P. Walsh, ‘Babe Ruth Came to Manila’. *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, (Jul 2002): 10.

¹⁸ Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*, 62.

was confirmed. This happened when he got a report that the sport was no longer promoted among elementary grade students in most provinces in southern Luzon, a trend that he initially saw in Laguna, the province where he was assigned.¹⁹

Apart from its weakened foundation among the young Filipinos, the dominance of the Japanese teams in Asian baseball competitions had also deprived local followers of the essential victories needed to attract more interest in the game. The absence of a notable record in the international baseball scene, likewise, left the game without the essential source of national pride. The sport failed to provide heroes, heroines, and notable events that would have made the sport into an important source of national pride and inspiration. Finally, the phenomenal growth of basketball between the 1936 Olympics, where the country made a credible showing to its third-place finish in 1954 World Basketball Championship, have more likely made the final blow to the heydays of baseball in the Philippines.

SPACE JAM: THE GEOGRAPHY OF GAMES

Any inquiry about why basketball prevailed over baseball to emerged as the country's premier sport would most likely have the relative lack of space in the archipelagic nation as an immediately answer. The length of a baseball field measures between 90-125 meters from the home plate to the fence while a standard basketball court is only 28 meters between the opposing goals. Thus the space-hugging sport of baseball simply did not suit well with a nation that was largely comprised of small islands. Although this

¹⁹ 'Confirmed,' *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. V, No 13 (Feb 1, 1940): 21. UPVM.

assertion makes some sense, the size of a playing surface alone was obviously not enough to account for the decline of baseball. This inadequacy is quite evident especially if one considers how baseball thrived in Japan, also an archipelago with a comparable size to the Philippines. Likewise, balls are not always batted out to sea in Cuba or other baseball-playing Caribbean countries, which are also archipelagic nations but with much smaller land areas compared to the Philippines.

Apart from the Philippines' fragmented geographical make-up, another reason for the frequently cited spatial limitation that allegedly hampered the development of baseball was due to the rapid urbanization of many areas around the country, especially during the second half of the 20th century.²⁰ From 1960-1990, the urban population of the Philippines grew rapidly, during which city dwellers increased its share of the total population from 28.8 percent to about fifty percent.²¹ Although the resulting congestion from the urbanization of the Philippines had provided a throng of new enthusiastic baseball players, finding a place to play had been increasingly difficult, if not completely impossible. Homeruns and stray balls often flew beyond the playing field that it almost became a challenge to put up a ballpark or a makeshift diamond in urban centers without necessary endangering glass windows and unsuspecting passersby.

Moreover, the high real estate value and the intense land use competition in cities often put baseball in a disadvantage position. This unfavorable situation becomes worst when

²⁰ Joseph A. Reaves, *Taking a Game*.

²¹ Lou Antolihao, *Culture of Improvisation: Informal Settlements and Slum Upgrading in a Metro Manila Locality*, (Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, 2004).

other sports, such as basketball, could also provide approximately the same form of leisure with a much less amount of space necessary. For instance, a report from the Department of Public Instruction in 1935 noted that: “In the schools and colleges, particularly the larger ones, athletic games which can be played in small-sized playgrounds were popular.”²²

The problems of congestion and overpopulation had further confounded the problem of space in Metro Manila. As the ballparks and other “empty lots” gave way to housing tenements, slum communities, or any other forms of urban structures, baseball’s place as one of the premier sports in the country had also gradually fade. For instance, in the scramble for space to rebuild the war-ravaged city after the Second World War, the Osmeña ballpark in downtown Manila was razed to make way for the construction of the city’s Central Market. Interviewed 30 years after the demolition of the historic playground, Conrado Serrano, one of its forgotten “stars”, grieved at the thought of what he considered as a great loss to Philippine baseball. According to him, the park was the “spawning ground of most of the country’s best and brightest baseball stars at that time, ...[where the] ‘Potato League,’ a baseball competition among grade school teams in the city’s various districts, took place.” He remembered playing for his school’s varsity team at ball field in 1934, and “told of how ‘the old Park’ hummed almost the whole year with baseball activity improving grade school students from all over the city.”²³

²² Department of Public Instruction, Commonwealth of the Philippines, *Narrative Report of the Department of Instruction as Required by Executive Order No. 861*, Manila, (1935): 22. Frank Murphy Papers, BHL-UMI.

²³ “Where Have All the Ballparks Gone? *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 78, (Nov. 26-Dec. 5 1976): 36. PNL.

But more than the fact that Philippine junior baseball's home is no more, Serrano said that what saddened him about the old stadium's 'passing' was that not too long after, local baseball also went into a sharp decline – a skid from which it never recovered.

Indirectly, Serrano blames the present state of baseball today to what the tearing down of Osmena Park symbolized. "It was, he said, "more than a structure that was dismantled but a system which in the golden years of Philippine baseball had enabled the sport to build a wellspring of talent from which replacements of aging stars could be drawn."²⁴

Indeed, the space factor played a big role in the decline of baseball in the Philippines. However, the problem was not simply about the "availability" of space but more on its "allocation." The case of the Osmeña ballpark had shown that for the urban planners and city officials, the importance of a new market far outweighs the significance of the area as a ballpark. In the same way as one of its most famous landmarks remembered as the present site of the Central Market, the glory days of baseball are also often recalled as a reference in understanding the current popularity of basketball as the premier sport in the country. In a way, the new public facility, the new national game, could also serve as a memorial to the one that had been replaced. "I guess," the former baseball "star" Conrado Serrano lamented, "you can say that what stood there wasn't a market but a baseball field, baseball held a place in our sports strata now occupied by basketball."²⁵

THE "BATTLE OF BALLGAMES"

The first hint of the impending "battle of the ballgames" in the Philippines came one fateful day in February 1910 when Governor-General William Forbes ironically awarded a basketball outfit to schools that won the division championships in that year's

²⁴ *Where Have All the Ballparks Gone*, 36-37.

²⁵ *Where Have All the Ballparks Gone*, 36.

provincial baseball series.²⁶ From then on, basketball increasingly took a more prominent position to challenge baseball as the most popular sport in the country. American soldiers shared the recognition with the YMCA for “planting the first seeds of the game” in the Philippines in 1905.²⁷ However, it was through the nurturance of the latter that the effort to develop basketball in the country came to fruition. Elwood Brown, the YMCA Physical Director who formally introduced a number of sport programs, first to the members of the American-European YMCA Branch and then, to public school students through his collaboration with the Bureau of Education. Prior to his assignment in the Philippines, he had been a basketball coach for one year at the University of Illinois.²⁸ He was the coach of the American YMCA team that won the National Basketball Championship for six straight years from 1911-1916.

The National Basketball Championship started in 1911, ten years after a similar league for baseball was organized in Manila. However, the tournament was basically made of teams supported by the same organizations that comprised the decade-old baseball association. Thus from 1911 to 1916 only American teams which represented Columbia Club, American YMCA, Fort William McKinley, and, every now and then, a US Navy team, competed in these championships. It was only in 1916 that a separate Filipino division was established. The two divisions were later combined to form the National

²⁶ *Athletic Handbook for the Philippine Public Schools*, 40.

²⁷ Teddyvic Melendres, ‘The Decades in Basketball,’ in Enrique M. Gonzales’ (ed.), *The Philippine Olympic Week*, (Manila: Philippine Olympic Committee, 1989): 22.

²⁸ YMCA, *Elwood Brown*.

Open Championship in 1923 after the number of American teams dwindled with the Filipinization of the government bureaucracy.²⁹

Table 3. Winners of the National Basketball Championship (1911-1923).

American Division	Filipino Division
1911 – American YMCA	
1912 – American YMCA	
1913 – American YMCA	
1914 – American YMCA	
1915 – American YMCA	
1916 – American YMCA	1916 – Internal Revenue
1917 – US Army	1917 – University of the Philippines
1918 – American YMCA	1918 – Internal Revenue
1919 – None	1919 – None
1920 – 15 th Infantry	1920 – Reach Co.
1921 – USS Huron	1921 – Reach Co.
1922 – Columbia Club	1922 – Spartan Co.
1923 – Submarine Flotilla	1923 – City YMCA

Source: *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Sept. 16, 1935): 10. UPVM.

At the grassroots level, basketball had caught the interest of many students, particularly among women who had no previous exposure to any sports, since its inclusion in the physical education curriculum of public schools in 1910. Because of its novelty, women basketball became one of the greatest crowd-drawers during the Manila Carnival's National Athletic Championship between 1911-1913. This turn of event, nonetheless, resulted in a small setback when some conservatives criticized the sport for its highly strenuous nature, which they largely saw to be inappropriate for women. In a case of double jeopardy, basketball got labeled as a "sissy game" because of its popularity as a women sport, which in turn fended off more interest from male players.³⁰ In the

²⁹ YMCA, *Elwood Brown*, 10. Also see Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*.

³⁰ Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*, 71.

following years thereafter, the ranking of basketball among the top sports in the country fluctuated between second and third place, particularly with the continuing mass appeal of baseball and the rise of volleyball among students and urban workers.

Table 4. Winners of the National Open Championship (1924-35).

Year	Team
1924	Manila Sporting Goods
1925	Manila Sporting Goods
1926	University of the Philippines
1927	University of the Philippines
1928	University of the Philippines
1929	University of the Philippines
1930	Manila Interscholastic Athletic Association
1931	National Collegiate Athletic Association
1932	Meralco Athletic Club
1933	No Award
1934	60 th Coast Artillery (US Army)
1935	University of Sto. Tomas

Source: *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Sept. 16, 1935): 14. UPVM.

It was only in 1924 when it was included as part of the newly-organized NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) that basketball received a new lease of life. The sport immediately caught the attention of tertiary level students and became the biggest crowd drawer in the rising multi-sport, inter-school tournament. The renewed interest in basketball spread quickly from the country's top colleges and universities to the rest of the population. Consequently, the game was recommended for inclusion as an official event in national inter-scholastic tournaments in 1935 due to its increasing popularity at the elementary and secondary levels, as well as in many inter-provincial competitions.³¹ Shortly thereafter, an article, which was one of the earliest recorded reference to

³¹ 'Comments,' *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 1, No. 6, (Oct. 16, 1935): 4. UPVM.

basketball as the most popular sport in the country, came out in the November 1935 issue of *The Filipino Athlete*. The highlight of the piece reads:

Perhaps no other game is as widely played today in the Philippines as basketball. No school is so small or obscure that it does not have a team that aspires to local championship at least. In every nook or corner of the archipelago there are ardent basketball fans and wherever there is a vacant lot anywhere, barefooted kids indulge in the sport with the zeal and enthusiasm of true amateurs. In the Philippines, basketball is the sport “par excellence”.³²

Looking back, this pronouncement mirrored the depiction of the pervasive influence of baseball in the Philippines by American writers, such as Dean Worcester, William Freer, and David Barrows, about 30 years earlier.³³ Interestingly, the rise of basketball paralleled the period of a renewed nationalist movement that culminated in the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1934. What were the reasons behind the decline of baseball? How were these factors related to the rise of basketball? How was the baseball-basketball transition related to the surge of nationalist and anti-colonial movement before the country gained full independence in 1946? The following sections try to answer these questions by exploring the relationship between nation-building and the making of national sporting culture in the Philippines during the American colonial period.

³² Alfredo del Rosario, Basketball Offense, *The Filipino Athlete* Vol. 1, No. 7, (November 1, 1935): 5, 11. UPVM.

³³ See William B. Freer, *The Philippine Experience of an American Teacher*; David C. Worcester, *Field Sport Among the Wild Men of Northern Luzon*; and David P. Barrows, *A Decade of American Government in the Philippines*.

The Invader vs. The Innovator:

Sport and the Conception of American Colonial Rule

Just after a year when the phenomenal rise of basketball to the zenith of Philippine sports was first reported, the Philippine basketball team came up with a remarkable performance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin that triggered a national frenzy. This event further boosted the position of basketball in the country's sporting hierarchy. Before the celebrations had completely waned, proponents of the displaced, and rapidly declining, sport of baseball pondered upon the misfortune that befell on their beloved game. Among the various factors that were seen to have contributed to its decline, the decrease of the number of American military personnel was one of the most interesting. A piece in a notable sports magazine pertinently articulated this observation, saying:

The progress that baseball has made in the Islands during the past years is due largely to the extensive competition which was made possible by the organization of strong army post teams that are located in various parts of the country. This was an advantage which, for many years, the Philippine baseball teams had over those in China and Japan and which was greatly responsible for the supremacy of our teams in Oriental Games. Unfortunately for baseball, the US Army forces were withdrawn from many parts of the country, and what Army troops there are that remain hardly play baseball. Thus we have lost one of the greatest factors that had been responsible for the development of America's national sport in the Islands.³⁴

Apart from the vacuum that was created by their departure, the prominent role of the American military personnel in the national baseball scene had resulted in the sport's identification of the United States as an "occupying power." Many baseball fields were also marching grounds for the huge number of combatants, which landed in the country during the Philippine-American War. Likewise, many of the pioneering teachers who introduced the game through the public school system were former soldiers who shifted

³⁴ 'Editorial: Is Baseball Dead in the Philippines?' *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. II, No. 21, (June 1, 1937): 8.

to a less perilous profession or those who decided to stay in America's new frontier after the Philippine-American War ended.

Furthermore, baseball's continued dependency on American military personnel also revealed how the game failed to completely acquire distinct local characteristics and integrate as part of the national cultural milieu. Overall, the Filipinization of baseball did not really took off that far and it largely remained as one of the American sports that just happened to be popular in the Philippines because of the strong influence of the United States. Thus the numerous baseball fields, just like the number of sprawling US bases and other military installations around the country, stood merely as monuments of American hegemonic presence in the country. In contrast, despite its origin as an American sport and the continued influence of the US in its development, basketball – as discussed in the other parts of this thesis – had been integrated and reinvented as distinctively Filipino as any other aspects of the nation's culture and traditions.

Rural Baseball vs. Urban Basketball

In his highly-acclaimed book on the social function of sports in the United States, Michael Mandelbaum described the rules, the techniques, and the overall playing pattern of baseball as reflective of its rural, agricultural, and traditional origins.³⁵ After it evolved from an old English game, baseball became the first “American sport” and the first modern sport to attract widespread following in the US.³⁶ As a product of its own time,

³⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 40.

³⁶ David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It: A Search for the Root of the Game*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

baseball embodied the largely agrarian, pastoral, and ever-expanding 19th century American society. When this expansion reached the Philippines in 1898, baseball was at the forefront since, as they say it: wherever the flag goes, baseball follows. Expectedly, baseball's flag fluttered more splendidly in the expansive countryside where US soldiers claimed farmlands to make way for their sprawling encampments. One of these military cantonments was the Fort McKinley in the outskirts of Manila where many local players, such as the legendary San Mateo High School baseball squad of Luis Santiago, learned and mastered the game of baseball.

Likewise, the sport also spread to the provinces through the public school system that the Americans had established across the archipelago. The new school buildings and their spacious playground was welcome addition not only to villages where basic institutions were non-existent, but also to towns whose existing Catholic parochial schools were mostly located in their convent's spare rooms. It was in these playgrounds that Filipino students learned English baseball terms even before they were able to master the alphabet.³⁷ Moreover, provincial inter-scholastic baseball tournaments also fed into village and provincial rivalries, and subsequently attracting an enormous following from the local population. It was because of this strong influence in the countryside that interest in baseball was sustained for a couple of years more after it had almost completely disappeared in the sport scene of post-war Manila. Thus provincial teams, such as the controversial Zamboanga squad that won the 1992 Little League World

³⁷ William B. Freer, *The Philippine Experience of an American Teacher*.

Series, still continued to exist even without the lavish attention given to other sports, especially basketball.

Furthermore, plantation teams, such as the Canlubang Sugar Estate and the Pampanga Sugar Mill, dominated even the top teams in country's premier leagues in Manila. Particularly, the Canlubang team (called Sugar Barons), which could boast of the only regulation baseball field located in their home base in Laguna province other than the Rizal Memorial Stadium in Manila, was a top-notch team that won several championships in the Manila Bay Baseball League (MBBL).³⁸ The long-time prominence of this organization in the national baseball scene reflected the association of the game with the agrarian way of life. This perception mirrored the general view in the United States where baseball has largely been appreciated for its nostalgic value as a reminder of the pastoral past that has long been overshadowed by the current urban-centered lifestyle. The Canlubang Sugar Barons eventually folded up when the MBBL was shut down in 1979 after more than 50 years of existence. Ironically, even the Canlubang Sugar Estate, the bastion of baseball in the Philippines also ceased to exist as it gave way to industrialization and other developments. On its site now stand one of the first industrial park in the Philippines, one of its largest golf courses, and several residential and commercial structures.

As baseball ultimately faded away with the passing of the agrarian era, basketball continued to rise as industrialization took a greater role in the Philippine economy and

³⁸ In Canlubang... 50 Years of Organized Baseball,' *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Jul-Aug 1967): 15-16.

society. In contrast to baseball which he described as a traditional, pastoral game, Mandelbaum presented basketball as “the post-industrial game” that reflects the character and the dynamics of the 21st century society.³⁹ In the Philippines, however, the scope of the basketball also covered the “industrial period”, which Mandelbaum attributed to American football. Football never had any significant influence in the country, and besides it was only quite recent that industrialization started to have a widespread impact in Philippines. Thus the baseball-basketball transition basically represented the passing from agrarian to industrial, from rural-centered to urban-oriented society.

This distinction could easily be pointed out by looking into the teams that comprised the country’s top leagues in each specific period. The baseball era was the heydays of plantation and basic manufacturing teams like the Canlubang Sugar Barons, whereas the basketball period had shown that the most prominent clubs were sponsored by big multi-national corporations, one of the salient features of the industrial and post-industrial societies. Although the popularity of basketball eventually spread to the countryside, its strong public appeal came as a result of the influence of modern mass media, particularly in the form of radio and television.

Interscholastic Baseball vs. Collegiate Basketball

The close association of basketball with the shifting metropolitan lifestyle was already established even during its infancy stage early in the 20th century. During this period, basketball started to attract attention as the favorite event in Manila’s top intercollegiate

³⁹ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 199.

tournaments. Meanwhile, baseball, despite its widespread popularity and the presence of top amateur leagues in the Philippine capital, was more prominently identified with elementary and secondary inter-scholastic tournaments, through which the game gained widespread following. This trend was the reason why even until recently, Philippine little league teams continued to figure prominently in international competitions. Generally, collegiate basketball, were urban-based, some of its top leagues, such as the UAAP and the NCAA, had members from advanced educational institutions located in Metro Manila. Whereas, the elementary and secondary schools that participate in inter-scholastic baseball competitions were mostly from the provinces.

Apart from being an important attribute to the rural-urban dichotomy, the identification of the two major sports to particular levels in the Philippine educational system was also one of the crucial factors that contributed to the baseball-basketball transition. Basically, the latter's popularity among the urban-based students and graduates of higher education institutions allowed it to appropriate the distinction of being the "modern sport". This image attracted the interest of the growing size of professionals and the new bourgeoisie who were closely connected to the colleges and universities, either as alumni or for having children who were enrolled in these institutions. This association with higher education, especially with the highly reputed private schools, also bode well for basketball leaders in their effort to promote the game to the rest of the population. The sport, likewise, caught the attention of aspiring students from the provinces and even those from lower class backgrounds who were afforded the chance to "play with modernity", to use Appadurai's term, by getting involved in the game of the city's

college and university students. This aspiration for higher education was especially enticing since the mass education system that was established by the American colonial regime opened up the greater opportunities for its realization.

Popular Pastime vs. The Bourgeois Ballgame

The baseball-basketball divide was also evident in how each of these sports is largely identify with the administrative nature (i.e. public vs. private) of the educational institution wherein they were popular. For instance, despite its widespread popularity, baseball failed to expand from its stronghold in the inter-scholastic athletic meets. Even after almost forty years of existence in the Philippines, it was reported that the majority of private educational institutions remained uninterested in the sport.⁴⁰ On the other hand, basketball was introduced relatively late in the inter-scholastic level (1935) and it took some time before it started to gain interest, especially in the provinces.⁴¹ Overall, this piece of information definitely added a more interesting angle into “the battle of the ballgames” that shaped the national sport scene during the American colonial period.

However, this general trend was made more fascinating by the fact that a school’s administrative nature largely determined their students’ social class background. In early 20th century Philippines (just as is it today), students with lower class background often studied in public schools while those in the middle and upper classes attended private educational institutions. As a result, baseball along with its large following in the

⁴⁰ ‘Editorial: Is Baseball Dead in the Philippines?’ *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. II, No. 21, (June 1, 1937): 8.

⁴¹ ‘Basketball in the Philippines,’ *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (Sept 1, 1935): 5-10, 14, 16, 25.

provincial and rural areas was immediately dubbed as “the team of the masses”. In turn, basketball due to its strong appeal among the educated urbanites was mainly seen as a bourgeois sport. Particularly, baseball was said to have attracted popular interest “first among the poorer section of the community, who were not bothered with tanned complexion or roughened hands.”⁴² Such physical characteristics, which were abhorred by the elite and those who tried to act like one, was almost unavoidable in a sport played under the sun and by swinging wooden bats. In contrast, basketball, an indoor sport often played under the shade of private school gymnasiums or behind a school building’s wall, became a convenient alternative to working-class baseball. Moreover, to the privileged students of the private schools and universities in the early 20th century, the involvement in basketball, along with other varsity events, was a way of adopting modern lifestyle. Such activities further defined their elite status and even served as a venue for its conspicuous display.⁴³

Consequently, the practice and following of these varsity sports became a signifying feature of urbanity and cosmopolitan sensibilities. Thus when a series of violence marred the Manila Interscholastic Athletic Association baseball games in 1935, many were horrified at what they thought were blatantly barbaric acts. A sport magazine commentary noted that such incidents would have been “dismissed indifferently” had it occurred 25 years earlier. “Or, if [they] happened in the provincial championships where the crowd is strongly partisan. The article went on with an obvious sense of frustration,

⁴² Nerio Andolong, *Youth Development Through Sports*, (Manila: self-published, 1977). Also see Joseph Reaves, *Taking a Game*.

⁴³ For a similar observation in Republican China, see Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*.

saying: “But in a cosmopolitan center like Manila, ... it is hardly conceivable that violence of this nature has been repeated with impunity, and without apprehending the culprits and giving them the punishment they deserve.”⁴⁴ Such incidence was immediately taken to reflect the “uncivilized ways” of the baseball fans, who were largely comprised of migrant rural folks and blue collar workers. In comparison, its rival sport was often cited for its admirable games where acts of hooliganism rarely happened. The same magazine would describe the overall environment of basketball games in Manila where people “have been accustomed to watching the [matches] as more or less a sporting and social event where crowd applaud the good plays regardless of which team makes them, and where they keep silent when there is anything which does not merit their approval.”⁴⁵

A decade later, a Philippine basketball team which visited the United States for a series of games against local clubs in 1949, failed to get the interest of Filipino migrants that resulted in poor attendance. Interestingly, their coach attributed the regrettable incidence to the social class make-up of the migrant communities, pointing to the fact “that most of the Filipinos, (majority-laboring class) had a preference for boxing and gambling.”⁴⁶ Again, basketball was represented as a sort of a sophisticated game that did not bode well as one of the leisure activities that working-class Filipinos in the US preferred to get involved with.

⁴⁴ ‘Comments,’ *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 1, No. 7, (Nov 1, 1935): 3.

⁴⁵ ‘Editorial: A Regrettable Incident,’ *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 2, No. 14, (Feb 16, 1937): 9.

⁴⁶ Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, *Minutes of the Thirty Second Annual General Meeting of the PAAF Board of Governors*, July 29, 1949, Rizal Memorial Coliseum: 79. UPVM.

In summary, the various forms of negative identifications of baseball – from its connection with people’s impression of the US as an occupying force, to its image as an agrarian game, its popularity among elementary and secondary students, and to its unfavorable representation as the game of the masses – all contributed to its decline as the country’s first favorite sporting pastime. On the other hand, the different positive associations of basketball, particularly on its close link with the general conception of the United States as a hewer of progress, its portrayal as a modern sport, its avid following in most college and university campuses, and the strong interest that the sport had attracted from the members of the upper and middle class populations, generally helped elevate its status to the pinnacle of the Philippines’ sports hierarchy towards the end of the American colonial regime.

SPORT AND THE NATION

Baseball, nonetheless, made a short comeback during WWII when Japan, one of the staunchest baseball-playing nations in the world, came to rule the Philippines for about half a decade. During this period a baseball league was formed in Manila with a couple of local teams from different government offices, the Nanyo Kohatsu squad (the name assumed by the famed Canlubang Sugar Barons), and a Nippon Club comprised of Japanese soldiers and civilian personnel.⁴⁷ Some Japanese wardens even organized

⁴⁷ Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*.

baseball competitions in the several concentration camps that they established in different spots around the country.⁴⁸

When the war ended, which also led to the declaration of the Philippines' full independence from the United States in 1946, the Manila Bay Baseball League matches was resumed and there were efforts to revived interscholastic baseball to develop young players. In 1950, the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation (PAAF) initiated the formation of a secondary baseball league open both to public and private schools. This was eventually replicated in major regional centers around the country where, for some time, they attracted some followers. In the international arena, the Philippines was the prime mover in the establishment of the Asian Baseball Federation (ABF) and hosted its first tournament in 1954.⁴⁹ Thus the competition between baseball and basketball did not end in the 1930s, and continued even after the country gained its independence from the American after the WWII. The following sections illustrate how the baseball-basketball rivalry continued to define the national sport scene this period.

Sport Participation and International Recognition

One of the major reasons behind the emergence of basketball as the country's premier sport was due to its success in gaining recognition for the country in major international competitions. This achievement was almost impossible in baseball because of the absence of major international tournaments due to the sport's limited growth in the global arena.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth H. Vaughan, *Community Under Stress: An Internment Camp Culture*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949).

⁴⁹ Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Philippines*.

In the world's biggest sports stage, for instance, baseball only became an official Olympic event in 1992 and was again struck out of the list of events for the 2012 Olympics in London for lack of global appeal. The growth of the sport had been limited, only finding its niche in North America, East Asia, and the Caribbean countries. In comparison, basketball had its Olympic debut in 1936 where the Philippines made a credible showing. Even in the Asian Games, baseball was only included in 1994 whereas a basketball championship has continuously been held since the top regional sport event's debut in 1951.

Major sports events, such as the 1936 Berlin Olympics provided a venue for the Philippines, which at that time, was only two years since obtaining some autonomy from the United States through the establishment of a Commonwealth government. It was the first time that the country was able to participate in any major international events under its own flag, even playing against an American team. The country's relative success in basketball at the 1936 Berlin Olympics was replicated almost 20 years later, when the Philippines won the bronze medal in the 1954 World Basketball Championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This accomplishment was notable for being the highest honor that an Asian country has ever achieved in major international basketball competitions. As a result, basketball became an important venue for obtaining valuable international publicity for the emerging nation-state, especially since its earlier attempt to proclaim independence from Spain in 1898 faltered after the revolutionary government failed to receive foreign recognition.



Figure 10. A Filipino player took a long shot during their match against Uruguay at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The Philippines won 33-23 in a game played under pouring rain (note the spectators under their umbrellas). *The Filipino Athlete* Vol. 9, No. 4 (June 1948): 19. Philippine Sports Commission Library.

This case found resonance in post-war Israel where basketball also played a role in promoting the still volatile and vulnerable nation-state to gain the support and respect of other countries.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, basketball had likewise influenced the formation of national identity in Lithuania where the sport became a potent “expression of national identity and resistance”.⁵¹ Just as the Philippines, the Eastern European country also experienced colonization when it came under the imperial rule of the Soviet Union. In particular, Cingiene and Laskiene noted how: “Basketball provided its fans with iconic national heroes and heroines who promoted Lithuania throughout the world by virtue of their

⁵⁰ Yair Galily, ‘Playing Hoops in Palestine: The Early Development of Basketball in the Land of Israel, 1935-56,’ *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Nov 2003): 143-151.

⁵¹ Vilma Cingiene and Skaiste Laskiene, ‘A Revitalized Dream: Basketball and National Identity in Lithuania,’ *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 21, No. 5, (Nov 2004): 778.

excellence and successes. These players have played a major part in the creation of the nation as a political entity.”⁵² In the same way, when the Philippine National Team was lavished with a celebratory parade and a reception at the President’s palace right after their return from the Olympics,⁵³ it meant that they did not only focus the attention of the spectators in Berlin to the country’s progress in basketball, but also to the overall progress of the Philippines.

However, apart from gaining international recognition, the participation and success in major sports events could also helped foster a sense of national pride and unity among people. The result of the Philippine National Basketball Team’s participation in the Berlin Olympics invoked a sense of collective frustration on the questionable ranking system that only earned the country a fifth-place finish despite having the second-best record.⁵⁴ Basketball was no longer a parochial preoccupation that consisted of playing for or supporting once school, neighborhood, or provincial team, but was already a national passion that engrossed much of the population. Hence, the impact of the event had shown that “a nation is not only bind together through its common territory, history, and ideologies but also through the collective symbols, experience, and memories“ that sports could provide.⁵⁵

⁵² Cingienne and Laskiene, *A Revitalized Dream*, 778.

⁵³ Ambrosio Padilla, ‘Our Berlin Itinerary: Continuation,’ *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 2, No. 7, (Oct. 16, 1936): 3-6, 15. UPVM.

⁵⁴ Jorge Afable, *Philippine Sports Greats*.

⁵⁵ Cingienne and Laskiene, *A Revitalized Dream*, 778.

Finally, the impressive performance of Philippine National Basketball Team in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, in return, “provided the inspiration and gave the impetus that [further] spurred the meteoric rise of basketball as the most popular sport in the Philippines.”⁵⁶ After this milestone event, the influence of the sport spread from its usual niches (i.e. urban, college, private school, upper class) that we discussed in the preceding sections, to the rest of the population. This development allowed the basketball to attract widespread following from the different sectors of society, turning the Philippines into one of the few “basketball republics” in the world.

“Competitive Advantage” and Regional Politics in Asia

In Asian context, the institutionalization of regional sports tournaments, likewise, helped shape the development of national sports in the Philippines. Basically, these competitions resulted in keen rivalries especially among the neighboring nations along the Pacific Rim, most notably Japan, China, Korea, and the Philippines. These momentous rivalries emerged due to the following factors: 1) the logistical advantage of their geographical proximity; 2) the countries’ parallel experience in the introduction of Modern sports during the late 19th centuries by American military personnel and Protestant missionaries; 3) their own history of economic and political disputes. As expected, countries tended to excel on their most popular sports largely because of the extra amount of resources, player exposure, and the pressure from local fans. In addition, national pride seemed to be more precariously at stake when teams compete in its country’s national sport.

⁵⁶ Jorge Afable, *Philippine Sports Greats*, 10.

Table 5. Winners of Asian Baseball and Basketball Championships, 1950s-1960s.

Asian Baseball Championship		Asian Basketball Championship	
Year	Winner	Year	Winner
1954	Philippines	1960	Philippines
1955	Japan	1963	Philippines
1959	Japan	1965	Japan
1961	Japan	1967	Philippines
1963	South Korea	1969	South Korea
1965	Japan		
1967	Japan		
1969	Japan		

Source: The Filipino Athlete, Vols. 12-22.

Over time, this trend led into a form of “competitive advantage” wherein countries claimed specific major sport almost as their exclusive domain and tried to dominate in all of its competitions. This observation, for instance, was evident during the first two decades after the Second World War when Japan ruled the Asian Baseball Championships while the Philippines made its mark in the Asian Basketball Championships (See Table 3.3). However, this feature could be trace back to the Far Eastern Games (1913-1934) where Japan was always deemed to be “the team to beat” in baseball while the Philippines almost swept the basketball events, winning nine out of ten championships. All these development generally contributed to the decline of baseball and the rise of basketball, especially during the early independence period.

Finally, Filipinos also started to associate baseball with Japan because of the impressive performance of the Japanese teams that regularly competed with local teams. This conception was further reinforced during the Second World War when the Japanese imperial regime, which ruled the country, promoted baseball among the citizens and even organized matches that Nippon soldiers and other colonial personnel actively

participated. The public enmity against Japan as a result of the brutal ending of their regime discouraged many Filipinos from immediately taking the bat and putting on the glove again.

Overall, this chapter has shown how the history of basketball in the Philippines followed a thread that closely intertwined with the formation of the nation-state. The making of the sport as the country's favorite pastime was forged by various events that were crucial to the development of basketball as well as of the nation. By the 1970s, however, this trend made a crucial turn as the relevance of the game gradually turned to emphasize on its lucrative niche in the local entertainment industry rather than on its previous role in making a name for the country in international competitions. This shift from the "national" to the "cultural" constitutes the main theme of the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HOLLYWOODIZATION OF HOOPS

Basketball, Mass Media, Popular Culture

From 1945 to 1991, the Cold War era saw the United States took a number of calculated steps to further expand its overall influence in Asia. Among its various undertakings, the promotion of American popular culture had largely been seen to have the most far-ranging and long-lasting impact. Some important innovations in mass media technology such as the large-scale production of television and the invention of satellite communication, helped in the transmission of American “cultural products” across the Pacific Ocean. Despite the ravaging effect of armed confrontations and a general feeling of political uncertainty, the Cold War period also facilitated the inroad of American music, film, television, and sport where it gradually became a dynamic force in shaping the everyday lives of many Asian people. Beyond the frontline, the expected sounds of deafening bombs and flustering cracks of gunfire merely rattled like fireworks as the period ushered in the raucous era of rock n’ roll, Hollywood, and ‘Showtime’ sports.

In political context, the inroad of American popular culture was part of the “containment” policy of the US, which was a comprehensive plan devised to put in check the advance of communism by exposing its “evils” and by promoting the “goodness” of American ideologies such as democracy, capitalism, and individual freedom. The bombardment of the local population with American propaganda was generally perceived to be as

effective as shooting missiles or ordering soldiers to attack.¹ On the other hand, the corroding effect of deindustrialization in the US since the 1970s, also forced many American companies to look overseas for expansion.² Among other strategic “growth areas” around the world, many economic planners saw the potential of the large Asian market as an ideal place to promote their products and services.

Sport, mainly due to its long-standing presence in the region, which goes back to the mid-nineteenth century, was one of the aspects of the American popular culture to have been integrated into the local way of life without much resistance. Initially, music, film, and television products from the US were considered as incompatible with local values or even seen to have corrosive effect on indigenous traditions. In comparison, sport was largely encouraged even by most socialist states for its important role in political mobilization. Generally, sport was recognized for its value in building an active and disciplined citizenry, in fostering national unity, and in promoting international recognition. Basketball, in particular, has gone a long way from a physical education exercise introduced by American protestant missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century to a familiar feature of everyday life in many Asian countries. Compared with other US sports, basketball was largely associated with American modernity³, and its

¹ Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

² Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, *Globalization and Sport*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

³ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*.

introduction in the region was largely understood as “an extension of American moral, political, and commercial ambitions”.⁴

In the Philippines, a country once under US rule, basketball almost seamlessly evolved from a colonial game to a national pastime in around half a decade. The sport has also largely been seen as a microcosm of Philippine society and its parallel history with the nation reflects a common struggle of rebuilding their own identities from the remnants of their colonial past. In a larger context, the case of Philippine basketball also represents the prevailing structure and dynamics of contemporary Asian popular culture. Generally, the process that turned the US game of basketball into an important feature of the everyday lives of most Filipinos can be used to understand how aspects of American popular culture were adopted and appropriated as an intrinsic part of the local cultural structures in many Asian countries.

This chapter examines the influence of American popular culture in Asia during the late Cold War era (1975-1991) in the context of Philippine basketball. The rise of visual mass media and the subsequent influence of American showbiz industry had transformed the professional basketball scene in the Philippines from a widely followed pastime sport into a highly popular entertainment spectacle. Referring to the process as the “Hollywoodization of hoops”, the chapter argues that the impact of this crucial turn of event had completely transformed the overall dynamics of basketball that became more

⁴ Judy Polumbaum, “Evangelism to Entertainment: The YMCA, the NBA and the Evolution of Chinese Basketball,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 179.

than just a game, as it evolved into a multi-faceted enterprise that encompassed the realms of sports, television, film, and music. Following Bourdieu's observation of modern sport, it shows how basketball "as a spectacle would appear more clearly as a mass commodity, and the organization of sporting entertainments as one branch among others of show business".⁵ Lastly, the discussion also looks into how the "Hollywoodized" Philippine Basketball Association (PBA), the country's premier league, helped maintain the popularity of the game despite the country's unremarkable record in international competitions by capitalizing on its popularity as a multi-media and celebrity-studded spectacle.

Although much has been written on the role of sports in international politics during the Cold War era,⁶ the impact of the period on local sporting culture, particularly in Asian context, largely remains unexplored. Thus instead of highlighting how sports became a "weapon" or a "battlefield" between conflicting nations, this study gives emphasis on how specific cultural practices like sports evolve during such critical period. An analysis of how the advance of American popular culture from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s had transformed the basketball scene in the Philippines provides a more specific and concrete picture to some of the interesting cultural impacts of the Cold War era. Moreover, it also gives us an idea of how the relationship of the United States with the Philippines and with Asia, in general, had developed over time. Finally, the case can offer some valuable insights into the overall feature of the "Americanization of Asia" and how

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "How Can One Be a Sports Fan?" in, Simon During (ed), *The Cultural Studies Reader: Second Edition*, (London: Routledge, 1999): 433.

⁶ See, Stephen Wagg and David L. Andrews (eds.), *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, (London: Routledge, 2007).

it is related to the larger discourses on neocolonialism, cultural imperialism, and globalization.

BASKETBALL, POPULAR CULTURE, AND THE COLD WAR IN ASIA

For about four decades, the Cold War era saw how sports became a symbolic battlefield where high-profile victories or the boycotting of major international sport events were considered as powerful diplomatic weapons.⁷ In Asia, the paths of athletics, politics, and the Cold War converged in a number of sports events. For instance, the controversial Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) that was held in Jakarta, Indonesia between November 10-22, 1963, was organized with the support of socialist states, particularly USSR, China, and North Korea to counter “the old and well-established Western tradition of the Olympics”.⁸ Primarily, the event was put together by Indonesia as a reaction to its suspension by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) for failing to provide travel visas to the delegates of Israel and Nationalist China (Taiwan) when the country hosted the Fourth Asian Games the previous year. A few months earlier, the Philippines was already suspended by FIBA (*Fédération Internationale du Basketball*) for refusing to provide entry visas to the Yugoslavian and other teams from socialist countries when the country was preparing to host the 1963 World Basketball Championship. As a result, it was excluded from the competition, the BAP (Basketball Association of the Philippines) was fined two thousand dollars, and the responsibility to

⁷ Stephen Wagg and David L. Andrews, *East Plays West*.

⁸ Ewa T. Pauker, “Ganefo I: Sports and Politics in Djakarta,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Apr. 1965): 185.

host the event was given to Brazil.⁹ About 20 years later, the ideological and political division created by the Cold War was again highlighted during the Olympics boycotts when most Asian countries which were associated with the US did not participate in the 1980 Olympiad in Moscow. In reprisal, many USSR-aligned socialist states in the region refused to send delegates to the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984.

In addition, Cold War politics also fed on some pre-existing international sports rivalry, which resulted in a number of highly publicized match ups between opposing Asian countries. Basketball, as one of the most ubiquitous team sports in the region was often transformed into a battleground where national teams fought out for regional supremacy. The Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC, now FIBA Asia Championship for Men or simply, FIBA-Asia), for instance, often turned into a spectacle not only of sheer sporting drama but also of immense outpouring of national pride.¹⁰ Particularly, this regional basketball tournament saw the rise of China as a sporting powerhouse, reflecting its emergence from decades of isolation to its rise as a major global political and economic player in the 21st century. After its debut in 1975, China was able to suppress the basketball supremacy of the US-aligned countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, and had been dominating the biennial tournament since.

⁹ International Federation of Basketball, *FIBA-World Championship History*, Date Retrieved: Nov. 3, 2008 (http://www.fiba.com/downloads/v3_abouFIBA/mp/FIBA_world_championships_history.pdf).

¹⁰ Ernie T. Bitong, "The Year That Was: Top Sport Stories of 1967," *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 20, No. 6, (Nov.-Dec. 1967): 16-17. UPML.

Apart from using basketball and other sports in promoting itself as an emerging global power, China also used them to foster good relations with its neighboring countries. For instance, it reopened bilateral relations with the Philippines with a much publicized “basketball diplomacy” in 1974. In April that year, a basketball delegation from the Philippines visited China not only to play a series of games against local teams, but more importantly, to serve as “goodwill envoys”. In return, a group of Chinese officials and basketball players arrived in the Philippines the same month to play against Filipino clubs. Before this event, the last sports delegation from China to visit the country came 40 years earlier, during the 1934 Far Eastern Games in Manila.¹¹ The event mirrored the “ping-pong diplomacy” between China and the US two years earlier, and it marked the opening of more favorable relations of the socialist country with the Philippines as well as with other countries in the region.

If China tried to use basketball to promote its international reputation, the Philippines had a more domestic use of the sport during most of the Cold War period. Generally, there were proofs that link the rise of the PBA into an immensely popular sport and entertainment attraction to the machinations of the authoritarian regime of President Ferdinand Marcos. One of the glaring evidences was the prominent role that some of his cronies and trusted allies had played in the league. For instance, Pablo Floro, Ricardo Silverio and Eduardo Cojuangco, three of the former President’s most trusted allies, owned the best-known teams in the league. The historic rivalry of Floro’s Crispa and Silverio’s Toyota teams, in particular, has been credited for fueling the intense basketball

¹¹ Anon, “Sports Diplomacy”, *The Filipino Athlete* Vol. 28, (March-April 1974): 11.

fanaticism not only on the hardcourt, but also deep in most Filipino homes.¹² In addition, the PBA games were also shown in a television company controlled by his top crony, Roberto Benedicto; while its most prominent television anchor, Ronnie Nathanielz, was another noted Marcos loyalist. Moreover, Marcos's son-in-law, Tommy Manotoc was a successful coach and team manager who won several PBA championships. The league during this volatile period in Philippine history, arguably, became a vital part of a larger conspiracy that was aimed to divert the attention of the Filipinos from the transgressions of his dictatorial rule. Just as the proliferation of pornographic films, which became more rampant during the Marcos' Martial Law period, the widespread following of the PBA games also became a titillating spectacle of scantily-clothed bodies, physical contacts, and climactic endings.

In the realm of popular culture, the overall atmosphere of political volatility, which came as a result of the Cold War, apparently, did not prevent but instead helped to facilitate the inroad of American popular culture in the region. For instance, a couple of local film industries thrived with a strong domestic following while increasingly attracting the attention of international film viewers. For instance, Hollywood had been borrowing significantly both from Japan and Hong Kong, especially in the production of animated and martial-arts films since the 1970s.¹³ Likewise, the inroad of Anglo-American music and its resulting subcultural trends provided the stimuli that resulted in the emergence of local popular music. Above all these notable changes, however, the history of American

¹²Recah Trinidad (ed.) *PBA: 20 Years in Pictures*, (Quezon City: Philippine Basketball Association, 1994): 13.

¹³Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, *Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

sports in Cold War Asia was even more remarkable. Until the later part of this period, American television shows and films were strictly censored and did not really penetrate many Asian countries, especially those who were not aligned with the United States, because of a well-founded suspicion that films and other visual media were being used for propaganda. In the same way, rock n' roll and pop music were usually branded either as subversive or too progressive, and were largely deemed as damaging, especially for the young generation.

Unlike television, film, and music, American sports, however, did not only develop in many US-aligned countries but had also thrived even in most socialist countries. For instance, Chinese basketball continued to flourish because of its strong association with the military and among the rural workers, which enhanced “its ‘popular’ quality by the Maoist ... definition”.¹⁴ Apart from its importance in promoting physical fitness and mobilizing the military as well as the entire citizenry, sports were seen as an important tool in fostering national unity. In many Asian countries, sporting events were used not only to bring large number of people together but also to serve as platforms for the conspicuous display of national symbols and power. During the height of the Cold War, the then newly independent country of Laos held its National Games in 1961 and 1964 to produce a counter narrative of unity and progress at a time when the country was racked

¹⁴ Andrew Morris, “‘I Believe You Can Fly’: Basketball Culture in Postsocialist China,” in Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002): 15.

by conflicts and uncertainties.¹⁵ These types of sport events were also organized in many other countries in the region for similar reasons. It was also partly because of these attractions that American sports found their way into the everyday lives of many Asian people, where these sports had been appropriated as important aspects of local cultural traditions.

In the Philippines, the late Cold War era saw how basketball, its American-introduced national pastime, further underwent another stage of “Americanization”. Particularly, the resulting professionalization of elite basketball in the mid-1970s had further unfolded a series of significant changes, which added a new chapter to the colorful history of the sport in the country.

THE “HOLLYWOODIZATION” OF PHILIPPINE BASKETBALL

Following the development of basketball in the US, the period between the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw the further inroad of American popular culture, which resulted in a crucial shift in the overall significance of the sport in the Philippines. In this critical phase of transformation, the following three features were most notable. First, the attempt to replicate the United States’ NBA (National Basketball Association) by a group of Filipino business leaders had resulted in the establishment of the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA), the first professional basketball league in Asia. Second, the increasing influence of mass media, more

¹⁵ Simon Creak, “National Games, National Unity? Sport and the Symbolic Construction of the State in 1960s Laos,” A Paper Presented at the 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies of Australia, 1-3 July 2008, The Sebel Albert Park Hotel, Melbourne, Australia.

specifically in the form of television, had allowed the PBA to expand from a mere professional basketball league into a multi-faceted entertainment enterprise. Finally, the evolution of the PBA into a mass media spectacle had, in turn, resulted in the rise of local sport celebrities. This group of athletes distinguish themselves from their predecessors because their appeal spread beyond the realm of sports. Apart from displaying their exceptional basketball skills in the hardwood, this new generation of sport celebrities also started to get involved in commercial endorsements, television shows, films, and began to receive the same media attention given to showbiz personalities.

Play for Pay: Mimicry, Identity, and Professionalization

Your country is just great. In a country so far from America, I am amused by your [life]style... We have more [or] less the same mode of living. Your music, your fashion, movies and television shows, etc. are the same as ours. I'm surprised that you have lots of American programs on TV. ¹⁶

Such were the words of Nate Stephens' as he marveled at the unexpected familiarity of his new social environment a few weeks after he arrived in Manila in 1976. In fact, he could have just mentioned himself and he would have come up with a more complete picture of the remarkable influence of the American popular culture in the Philippines. Stephens, a professional basketball player from the US, was one of the "imports" hired to "spice up" the PBA games that year. He and a couple of other compatriots, nevertheless, were not the only ones that were foreign in the PBA since almost every aspects of the league were copied from the premier American basketball league. "Indeed men behind the local pro cage league have done almost everything and revived rules to make the league resemble

¹⁶ Anon, "And Now Comes the Weathermakers: Nate Stephens," *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 62, (Aug. 9-15, 1976): 13.

the NBA”, wrote one Filipino journalist.¹⁷ Apart from bringing in American players to add height and raise the league’s overall level of play, mimicry was also evident in the way the local league formulated its tournament rules, competition format, team management, and media broadcasting.

However, despite the strong influence of the NBA, the local league had also its own uniqueness that could be attributed to the long history of basketball in the Philippines. First, the PBA was entirely organized by Filipinos and it originated from a local amateur league called MICAA (Manila Industrial and Commercial Athletic Association). This commercial outfit was established in 1938, several years before the NBA started in 1946. Initially, MICAA players were comprised of employees holding day jobs but it eventually evolved into a semi-professional league where the best basketball athletes in the country played. Towards the 1970s, however, various issues plagued the league that divided its member teams between those who aspired for the professionalization of the league and those who wanted it to keep its amateur status. The problems started from the occasional drafting of MICAA players to the Philippine National Team, which disappointed some team owners because the practice disrupted the league’s schedule. In addition, there were also questions about the amateur standing of MICAA players because most of them were already full-time athletes. There were also allegations that the players were actually paid “under-the-table” deals to circumvent the rules that disallowed

¹⁷ Bitoy Bonifacio “How Pro Are the PBA Pros?” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2 No. 122, (Oct. 1-8, 1976): 34.

amateur cagers from receiving salaries.¹⁸ Eventually, the division has led some teams to bolt out of MICA to establish the PBA.

Second, instead of having each team based in a particular city/province like the NBA, logistical limitations have compelled the PBA to have all its teams based in Metro Manila. This set up suited with the overall economic structure of the Philippines where facilities, such as large arenas were initially located in the country's capital. The large mass of the population were also concentrated in and around the metropolis providing the league with a strong base of spectators. In addition, the high cost of regularly transporting teams from one city to another was just too much of a financial burden for a league whose pockets were not as deep as the NBA. Third, the prominence of companies, which sponsors the league teams, was also one of the unique features that distinguished the PBA from its American counterpart. For instance, NBA teams are named after the city or the state where they are based, so you have the Boston Celtics, New York Knicks, Los Angeles Lakers, etc. In comparison, PBA teams are named after the companies that owned them, thus names such as San Miguel Beermen, Alaska Milkmen, Sta. Lucia Realtors. This mark was a reflection of the league's beginning as an amateur commercial league. Hence, when the league started, a league official noted how it "was not a moneymaking operation." Highlighting that "[t]he value [for the PBA teams] was exposure for companies that had products to sell, of using their advertising budgets to finance their teams."¹⁹ Lastly, the PBA also instituted some distinctive rules, the most

¹⁸ Jimmy Cantor and Bong Barrameda (eds.) *PBA: The First 25*, (Quezon City: Philippine Basketball Association, 2000): 14.

¹⁹ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 17.

notable of which was the introduction of the three-referee system, which aimed to prevent dirty plays and on-court melees that was becoming a regular fixture in a startup league that was characterized by intense competitions and hostile rivalries. This rule was eventually adopted by the NBA in 1978 and had since become a permanent feature of America's top basketball league.²⁰

Through these unique attributes, the PBA developed into a distinctly Filipino cultural figure despite having much of its features taken from the NBA. Apparently, the long history of the Philippines as a US colony and post-WWII ally had spun strong ties that bound the latter's cultural practices as an essential piece of the local cultural fabric. Thus, unlike in most other Asian countries, the inroad of American popular culture in the region during the Cold War period did not really come as a novelty in the Philippines. The "professionalization" of the top basketball league in Philippines in 1975 was largely seen as a milestone in the continuous evolution of the sport in the country rather than as an impact of a larger wave of "Americanization" that was, at that time, sweeping across the Asian region.

In fact, when Filipino basketball fans watch the PBA games, nothing seemed to appear so distinctly American to them apart from the presence of "imports" who came to play during certain stretches of the year. Although these foreign reinforcements end up as the best performers in most games, they were not able to draw the same attention that was accorded to popular Filipino cagers. In comparing the contributions of the American

²⁰ Recah Trinidad (ed.) *PBA: 20 Years in Pictures*, (Pasig: Philippine Basketball Association, 1994).

imports to that of the local players, a league official noted how they “only lend color to the tournaments ... games in the PBA are won and lost by the local boys”.²¹ To underscore this distinction, only Filipino players were qualified for most of the prestigious year-end awards such as the “Most Valuable Player”, which ran in contrast to the NBA’s practice of giving locals and foreign players equal footing in vying for individual honors. In consolation, the foreign players compete among themselves for the less-heralded “Best Import” award. Finally, the league holds an All-Filipino Conference where only locals could participate, barring foreigners from playing for the entire year. Thus, it was quite apparent that in the PBA universe, all the celestial bodies conspired to make sure that only the Filipino superstars shined the brightest.

When the PBA was established in 1975, many believed that the formation of the league was good for Philippine basketball. Ramon Fernandez, one the top players at that time who eventually went on to have one of the most illustrious professional careers in local basketball, was one of them. For one, he noted how the establishment of the professional league would help the Filipino improve on their technical knowledge of the game. Moreover, Fernandez also thought that, with the PBA, “young collegiate players would aspire to play a better brand of basketball to serve as their passport to the pro league where there is a higher standard of competition.”²² Indeed, with the availability of high-tech facilities, well-trained coaches, and other essential resources, the league was able to nurture the best basketball talents most of whom figured prominently later on in the local

²¹ Leonardo V. Micua. “No Longer Brittle... The Noritake Festival,” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 65, (Aug. 29-Sept. 5, 1976): 20. PNL.

²² Bessie O. Bauto, “Mon Fernandez: Toyota’s Deadly Beanpole,” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 59, (July 18-25, 1976): 13. PNL.

basketball scene. However, apart from the lure of being a professional athlete, the PBA had also been attracting young players because of the public attention and the glamour that comes with playing in the centerstage of hoopsdom in the Philippines.

Basketball in a Box: Sport, Television, Mass Media

The rise of professional basketball in the Philippines apparently did not emerge through the context of the sport alone. The advancement in mass media technologies, particularly with the widespread use of television, had also contributed to the growth of the PBA. “For more than 50 years, Filipinos have been hooked on basketball,” a veteran journalist calls to mind, “[a]nd with the television and radio broadcast of the games, our love for it has grown even more.”²³ Although sports has long been a regular feature of the local print media since the turn of the twentieth century, as well as of radio broadcast since the 1920s, it was only during the expansion of television broadcasting in the 1970s when the visual spectacle of sporting competitions was able to overflow beyond the limited confine of the arena. The print media could only provide news or feature stories of sport events and personalities. Radio afforded listeners more immediate information but they were still limited to the accounts and analysis of the broadcaster, who was but a spectator himself. The coming of the television, however, enabled the audience not to only to know about what happened but also, in a way, to experience it themselves.

Television was not yet that popular when the PBA was established in the mid 1970s, with radio still being the most useful way of reaching its audience nationwide. But its era as

²³ Manolo Iñigo, “Overkill,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 2, 2008: A30.

the primary medium of mass entertainment had already started to dawn. Despite its limited reach, television earnings already contributed a significant part to the league's total revenue in its first year of operation.²⁴ This favorable start continued to grow as the PBA games rose to become one of the most popular television programs in the country.

Appropriately, a journalist's description of the role of television in the growing popularity of American professional basketball in the 1970s was also proven to be true in the Philippines. He pointed out how television "made the game more potent commercially;" expanded its audience base and allowed for more money to be made than before.²⁵ Unlike the American professional basketball, however, the PBA had just started, and its origin as an amateur inter-corporate league was still gaining more influence than its future as a multi-million business enterprise. The PBA was not that profitable yet and it still relied on subsidy from its member companies to sustain its operation.²⁶ Thus the support from some of the top business conglomerates in the country helped to nurture the PBA during its years of infancy. It did not take long, however, before television helped the league to grow and achieve its objective to be self-sustainable.

By the 1980s, local media surveys had shown that the PBA had already developed into a widely viewed primetime television program. This transformation generally followed a

²⁴ Anon, "Toyota and Crispa-Floro Again and Again! A Dominance can Spell Financial Disaster for the PBA," *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 79, (Dec. 5-12, 1976): 4-5. PNL.

²⁵ Judy Polumbaum, *Evangelism to Entertainment*, 203.

²⁶ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 17.

larger global trend, which saw a strengthened relationship between professional leagues and television.²⁷ A 1981 television ranking placed the PBA fifth with a 17.3 percent audience share on a six-month average of multi-weekly programs, behind two famous soap operas and two primetime news programs. The much-awaited encounters involving its most popular teams could even get as much as 50 percent share of the viewing public. As a result, television revenue emerged as the PBA's top earner, especially with companies fighting it out for a chance to place commercials during the broadcast of its games. The company, which received the exclusive rights to show the PBA games on television, paid four million pesos, which was already a huge amount of money at that time.²⁸

Nonetheless, the good revenue from television rights and advertisement did not dissuade the league from further improving its TV coverage format the following year. Indeed the 1982 season saw a number of innovations in the PBA that many local sportswriters dubbed it as "The Year of Change".²⁹ Some of the most notable modifications were in technical production where new equipment, a more dynamic broadcasting style, and a couple of new expert analysts were introduced to make the PBA games even more appealing to the television viewers. The idea was to veer away from traditional play-by-play reporting of the events that transpired in the playing court. This outdated technique was a spillover of the radio era when a detailed account of the play-by-play actions was

²⁷ Garry Crawford, *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport and Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004): 130.

²⁸ Bert Eljera, "The PBA League as Top TV Spectacular," *1981 PBA Annuals*, (Pasig: Philippine Basketball Association, 1981): 18.

²⁹ Recah Trinidad, "1982: The Year of Change in the PBA," *1981 PBA Annuals*, 5-6.

necessary for the listeners to get a view of what was going on during the game. With television, this type of broadcasting became redundant and boring since the audience already had a direct visual contact of what was happening. The PBA tried to address this problem by bringing in three former coaches – two Filipinos, one American – as game anchors in order to provide expert analysis of the game situations. These new game analysts helped the PBA came up with “lively, intelligent, and interesting” television coverage by putting in “more insights into the game” and by making adjustments to “tone down on the obvious”.³⁰ “We will be more analytical. We will use more cameras... It will be like the NBA, more professional,” a league official noted how these changes would impact on the overall philosophy of the country’s premier professional basketball league.³¹

Generally, these improvements in the television coverage of the PBA games enabled the league to bring basketball out from the arena, and into the comfort of every follower’s home. With high-tech, more probing and portable cameras, the viewers could take a closer look at every play, or even see them in different angles. Instead of watching panoramic shots of vague moving figures, the new visual recording devices could let them see their favorite basketball stars up close. Likewise, the technology that allowed the replay of the game’s highlights could prolong the audience’s excitement that often would just quickly dissipate given the fast pace of the game. Finally, the analytical reporting provided deeper, informative, and more exciting coverage by relying not only

³⁰ Vic Villafranca, “The Philippine Basketball Association in the Year of the Dog,” *1982 PBA Annuals* (Pasig: Philippine Basketball Association, 1982): 7.

³¹ Recah Trinidad, “1982: The Year of Change in the PBA,” *1981 PBA Annuals*, 5.

on the commentator's expertise but also on well-researched and systematically compiled data of team statistics, individual profiles, and interesting trivia. Moreover, it also became a common practice for the game announcers to sensationalize and exaggerate their reactions to exceptional plays, regularly blurting out interjections to underscore slam-dunks and other crowd-pleasing performances. These new innovations, therefore, made the basketball more thrilling, action-packed, and full of drama. In short, they incorporated into the PBA games the distinctive qualities of a Hollywood show.

From Cagers To Celebrities

Well, what is Hollywood without its stars! The development of the PBA during the late Cold War period had also resulted in the ascension of basketball celebrities in the country's top entertainment scene. Although highly popular athletes have already been attracting a huge number of followers since the early 20th century, their prominence rarely went beyond the context of sports. However, the "hollywoodization" of Philippine basketball from the mid-1970s had further elevated the status of some well-known basketball players from sport celebrities to entertainment superstars. With the evolution of the PBA into a much-awaited primetime television spectacle, many of its athletes have captured a great deal of media attention that was previously accorded only to famous movie and music personalities. Just like Hollywood celebrities, PBA stars were forged by the combination of talent and the insatiable media attention that amplified their personalities. As one of its marquee players so aptly stated during the early years of the professional league:

Makikilala ba ako kung hindi sa TV, sa magasin, sa diaryo? Maski maglaro ako araw-araw, maghapon, at magbumabad sa coliseum kung walang maglalagay sa peryodiko at sa TV, wala rin ako! [Would people know me if not for TV, the

magazines, and the tabloids? Even if I play everyday and stay in the coliseum from morning till late in the afternoon but if my name would not appear on the newspaper and on TV, I would still be nobody!].³²

Among the many superstars that the league had churned out in more than three decades of existence, few have reached the remarkable success of the “glamour boys”³³. The group, who together came to the PBA in 1988, was part of the “second generation” of Filipino basketball superstars who arrived when the celebrated pioneers of the league were already losing their luster. They started a new era in the annals of the PBA and the history of Philippine basketball with meteoric rise in the local entertainment scene. Notably, what distinguished the “glamour boys” from previous PBA superstars was their ability to shine beyond the world of basketball.

Apart from being multi-awarded professional basketeers, the Glamor Boys were also well-known as commercial models, product endorsers, television personalities, and movie actors. Likewise, stories and gossips on issues regarding their professional and personal lives regularly graced the pages of local tabloids, magazines, and other print media. In short, they were more showbiz personalities rather than just popular basketball players. Although, a couple of famous cagers had previously appeared in films, they were not as active and as renowned as showbiz celebrities as the “glamour boys”. The importance of these sport celebrities was highlighted, later on, when a new professional league emerged to challenge its supremacy as the Philippine’s premier basketball organization. The PBA

³² Salvador A. Avendanio. “The Making of a Basketball Star,” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 100 (Apr. 26 – May 2, 1976): 9. Also see Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 16-17. PNL.

³³ The group includes Alvin Patrimonio, Gerry Codinera, Paul Alvarez, and Jojo Lastimososa.

responded by highlighting its well-known players and by marketing itself as the “Bayan ng Superstars” (The Nation of Superstars).

The rise of professional basketball players into celebrities, however, had received its fair share of criticisms. For example, many believed that the glitter and glamour of Tinseltown could serve as a distraction, which could affect an athlete’s performance on the court. Thus when Atoy Co, one of the PBA’s earliest superstars, scored way below his average in a game in 1976, many writers were quick to put the blame on his over-exposure to showbiz lifestyle for his subpar performance. Apparently, there were good reasons behind their allegations. While playing for the league that year, Co was also busy shooting for his first movie appearance. In parallel, he was taking some time to look after a new restaurant that he set up with a movie actress who was rumored to be his lover.³⁴ Stories like Atoy Co’s became a common episode throughout PBA’s existence as many of its players continued to receive enormous public attention as entertainment celebrities and popular culture icons.

Beyond the glamour and its many trappings, however, playing in the PBA was in itself, an immensely rewarding profession. When the league was established in 1975, players were just happy to get a stable salary, which was a considerable improvement compared to the meager allowance that they used to receive during their amateur days. However, their income had steadily increased as their role became more central to the existence of the league. By the early 1990s, the first multi-million contracts were signed and many

³⁴ Francisco Jocson, “Atoy’s Career at a Skids,” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 98 (April 16-23, 1976): 12-13. PNL.

PBA players had been receiving similar amount of compensation since. Given the other benefits that could be derived through bonuses and endorsement deals, a PBA player's average income stood out as one of the highest among the local entertainment celebrities.

In fact, professional sports – especially basketball, is arguably the only avenue of social mobility in the country where mere talent alone was enough to get one from the bottom to the pinnacle of society. Not even the local film industry, whose stars often come from a number of “showbiz families”, could compare to this uncommon structure of meritocracy. Hence, the PBA abound of rags-to-riches stories. Its history was filled with tales of people overcoming great adversities, similar ingredient that makes a delectable Hollywood recipe. The league was “like a long-running television soap opera” according to the league's former commissioner, “[t]o the ordinary fan, the PBA offers an escape from the clutches of endless politics, the troubles around the world, the pangs of hunger, and the litter of broken dreams.”³⁵ Through these years, the league's success was not only evident in its effort to provide a widely accessible form of entertainment to its millions of followers. But with the remarkable rise of its celebrated protagonists from the abyss of poverty and obscurity, it had also done its fair share of giving inspiration and hope to the millions of suffering and marginalized Filipinos.

THE LEAGUE AND THE NATION

With the “Hollywoodization of hoops”, basketball did not only develop into an avenue for social mobility but also served as a bridge which spanned the marked division

³⁵ Noli Eala, “The Philippines' Basketball League,” *FIBA Assist Magazine*, (June 2004): 49.

between social classes in the Philippines. This trend was especially noted during the height of PBA's popularity in the early 1990s when the basketball arena became a trendy place for people 'to see and to be seen'. A sport journalist pointed out: "Whereas before, we had a crowd that was predominantly *masa* [from the masses], today the rich and beautiful, famous actors and actresses, and big time like senators and congressmen mingle freely with our regular customers. Even presidential daughter Kris Aquino came in almost regularly at the Ultra [indoor stadium] for the games."³⁶ This turn of events was evident even beyond the arena when it became a common sight in the countryside or in urban slum areas for better-off families to open their doors, and even windows, so their less-privileged neighbors could watch basketball games from their television sets.

Moreover, spotting President Cory Aquino's daughter among the crowd of fans also entailed the expansion of the widespread interest in basketball to this group which, in Philippine society was largely deemed to be uninterested in following sports: women. Although women have long been actively participating in various sports since the turn of the 20th century, the avid following of spectator sports, with its propensity for violence and gambling, has long been the reserve of men. However, with the "Hollywoodization of hoops", basketball became not just a sport but also a star-studded spectacle that appealed even to those who did not know much about the game. "It was entertainment because the public enjoyed watching the game and you could see them get involved in the game, cheering, and so on;" noted one former league executive. He added, "[y]ou met all kinds of people going to the games, women, young people, men. It was a healthy form

³⁶ Al S. Mendoza, "Year of Firsts, Comebacks... Romance," *PBA Annuals 90-91*, (Pasig: Philippine Basketball Association, 1991): 4.

of amusement.”³⁷ Particularly, the coming of the ‘glamour boys’ in the late 1980s attracted a legion of female fans that were eager to get a glimpse of their beloved basketball superstars. To add more showbiz flavor to it all, the president’s daughter was actually rumored to be dating one of the ‘glamour boys’ at that time, which explained her frequent visits to the PBA games.

Aside from these notable changes, the “Hollywoodization of hoops” has also reshaped the overall character of hoop fandom in the country. Previously, the Filipino basketball followers only came as a collective body to support the national team during the intermittent periods when international competitions were held. Without these major sport events, Filipino basketball followers generally retreated back to their own communities to follow the local or municipal leagues. However, this void was filled with the establishment of the PBA, as its thrice-a-week schedule spanning over a ten-month period provided an extended attraction for the Filipino basketball fans.

In addition, the television broadcast of the games made the professional league accessible even to the remotest part of the country. In this way, the convergence of the basketball and mass media formed a pervasive cultural phenomenon that “created the possibility of a new form of imagined community”.³⁸ Thus, when a basketball player from the central Philippines distinguished himself during the early years of the PBA, the media pointed out that he did not only please the people of his province but the entire nation as well. They wrote: “Manny Paner, that sturdy, most dependable hoopster who is pride of most

³⁷ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 16.

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 46.

Cebuanos. Not only Cebuanos but Filipinos of all regions as well.”³⁹ Arguably, the rise of the game as a popular mass media spectacle further unified the Filipino basketball followers, if not the entire nation, that has long been fragmented by geographical, ethno-linguistic, and other social divisions.

FROM NATIONAL TO POPULAR

Ironically, the late Cold War era, which saw the popularity of the Philippines’ favorite sport soar to new greater heights, also marked the period when the country started to slide down from the apex of international basketball. After decades of dominating the Asian basketball scene as well as coming up with a number of notable showings in the Olympics and the World Basketball Championship, many local basketball followers were disappointed when the country started to suffer a long string of losses, which started in the mid 1970s. The last time a Philippine national team played in the Olympics was in 1972 Munich Games, where it placed 13th among 16 participants. Since then, the country had not qualified for the basketball tournaments in the quadrennial sports event. In regional competitions, Filipino squads bagged four of the first seven ABC (Asian Basketball Confederation, now FIBA-Asia) crowns, with the last one in the 1974 series (Seoul). However, it had to wait for another 12 years to win again in 1986 (Kuala Lumpur). Unfortunately, the country was not able to reach the medal round again since. The Philippines was even more unfortunate in its long bid to win the Asian Games basketball championship after winning it four straight times in the initial staging of the prestigious regional sports event. After its final victory in 1962, the Philippine national

³⁹ Max Baguio and Baby Alenton, “From the Orangemen,” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 67 (Sept. 12-19, 1975): 22. PNL.

team had fallen short in its several attempts to reclaim the title. The last time it came close to taking the gold medal was in 1990 (Beijing) when the country placed second to the host Chinese team.

There are two obvious reasons behind the mediocre record of the Philippine national basketball team, particularly in regional basketball competitions in the past three decades. First, the inroad of American popular culture during the Cold War era and the promotion of basketball in socialist states as a venue to play off their rivalry with the United States,⁴⁰ resulted in the rise of the sport in many Asian countries; thereby making the regional tournaments more competitive. For instance, even as early as 1958, an American coach whose college basketball team came to play a series of games against Asian teams noted how the local population in the region had already shown greater interest in the sport. According to him:

[Our] team traveled through 8 different countries in the Orient and found basketball improving at almost every area where we were privileged to play. The Philippines are still the leaders, but other countries are making rapid progress and we have found a real desire among some of the Asiatic basketball aspirants to learn everything possible about the game.⁴¹

Second, the professionalization of its top basketball league had worked against the country since the important international basketball tournaments such as the Olympics, the World Basketball Championships, and the Asian Games were, until 1990, only opened to amateur players. Hence, before that period, the Philippines was forced to send second-rate athletes or inexperienced collegiate players, who were often left hapless

⁴⁰ Wagg and Andrews, *East Plays West*.

⁴¹ Don J. Odle, "Basketball in the Philippines," *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 14, No. 22 (December 1958): 3.

against the vastly-improved national teams of South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China. So when the rest of the region was busy preparing for the 1977 ABC tournaments, the Philippines was still contemplating if it should even participate in the event. “Perhaps if our players for that ABC would include [PBA players], then that would be a different story. *Pero masyado tayong napilayan* [but we were really crippled]... and these [national players] are really raw.”⁴² The country eventually decided to send its delegation but the haphazardly organized team only placed fifth, behind China, Korea, Japan, and Malaysia.

The string of losses in international competitions had caused much frustration to many local basketball fans. Criticisms also started to set in, especially from those who tried to resurface the long-standing issue on the unsuitability of the game to the Filipino physical makeup. Ten years earlier, a prominent Filipino senator’s message to an athletic delegation, which just returned from an unremarkable stint at the 1966 Asian Games pretty much captured the sentiment of those who believed that basketball in the Philippines was being given too much importance. In his speech, he pointed out how:

A great deal of disappointment had been aired about our not winning in basketball. Even this fact to me is not discouraging. It should result in a modification of our attitude toward our undue emphasis in basketball. Our natural limitation of height does not enable us to win or even expect to win international championships. It is my considered observation that we had had undue attention to basketball. I admit that it is an excellent game but it is unnatural for us to expect winning against six footers or even seven footers.⁴³

⁴² Salvador A. Avendano, “Should They Go To Bangkok,” *Sports Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 74 (Oct. 31 - Nov. 7, 1976): 10. PNL.

⁴³ Camilo Osias, “Filipino Athletes Deserve Praise,” *The Filipino Athlete*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1967): 30.

Similar comments had since surfaced many times, especially when another batch of the national basketball team had returned home from an international competition empty handed. All these criticisms, however, seemed to have not much impact on the overall standing of basketball in the Philippines as the sport continued to attract more followers in each passing years. *How did basketball remain popular in the Philippines even after its performance in international competitions had been unsuccessful?*

The answer to this question lies in the “Hollywoodization of hoops”, which had ironically continued to uphold the popularity of basketball in the Philippines while the country had languished in the cellar of international basketball hierarchy. Clearly, the general emphasis of local basketball during the late Cold War period had shifted from an externally oriented *national symbol* to an inward looking and self-perpetuating aspect of local *popular culture*. Thus the evolution of basketball from a national pastime to a multi-faceted icon of the local entertainment scene had kept the people’s interest in the sport. The excitement of the PBA games and the league’s overall image of glamour were just too fascinating and consuming to leave the Filipino basketball fans some time to preoccupy him/herself with the country’s disappointing performance in international competitions. As one veteran journalist so aptly puts it:

We will not win a world basketball crown, or relive the glory days of Brazil in 1954 [when the Philippines won a bronze medal in the World Basketball Championships]. But it’s no longer a question of how high our national team can rise in international arenas. What makes basketball a perennial top-grosser, is the way our superstars play it. Or, more aptly, how we think these living icons play the game.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Recah Trinidad, “Basketball is Not The Name of The Game”, in Marites Pardo-Panlilio’s, *Dribblers: A Photographic Essay on Basketball Players of the Philippines*, (Manila: PT Picturehouse, 1990).

Nonetheless, the “Hollywoodization of hoops” does not suggest that the Filipinos had enjoyed watching the local PBA games on television so much that it almost totally forgot about the rest of the basketball world. In fact, the entire series of events was connected to larger processes that through these years had been going on in almost every patch of the globe. The rise of the PBA as the paramount stage of Philippine basketball, for instance, was a “sporting corollary of the general trend toward MNC economic domination [where] privately owned teams [are more prominent] than the nationally representative ones.”⁴⁵

Eventually, the influence of the American popular culture spread further to the rest of the region, especially in China whose relationship with US took a decisive shift during the last two decades of the 20th century. In the context of basketball, the impact of this crucial transformation is evident in how the sport evolved from something that, in the 1970s, was generally defined by its “popular” Maoist context into its current structure, where “the globalizing commercial forces of the NBA and Nike [has displaced] the center of Chinese basketball world.”⁴⁶ The development of basketball in the Asian region, therefore, represents the impact of the “Americanization of Asia” as well as demonstrates how sport becomes an important agent of social change. Finally, apart from the external influence that came in through the advance of mass media and the American popular culture since the late 20th century, the “internal construction” of Philippine basketball, particularly through the active following of the local fans, has also contributed to the growth of the country’s favorite pastime. The following chapter will expound on this particular assertion.

⁴⁵ Giulianotti and Robertson, *Globalization and Sport*, 11.

⁴⁶ Andrew Morris, *I Believe You Can Fly*, 15.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROOTING FOR THE UNDERDOG

Sport, Spectatorship, Subalternity

Can you imagine playing in a place with empty seats?

- Robert Jaworski, Filipino basketball star-turned-senator¹

Basketball has come a long way from its origin as a physical education regimen carried out inside closed gymnasiums to its current status as one of the most popular spectator sports in the world. Since the 1970s, basketball has evolved into a huge public spectacle with followers that greatly outnumber those who actually play the game. In the Philippines, a nationwide survey shows that about 73.5 percent of the total population follows basketball, both as live spectators and television viewers, while only 33.5 percent actually sweats it out and gets satisfaction in running around the hardcourt and shooting balls into hoops.² At a glance, it appears that Filipino basketball followers across the country almost readily come together to witness their favorite pastime. From the glitzy arenas of the top professional league in Metro Manila to the dusty makeshift hoop clearings in far-flung villages, no game seems to be complete without the spectators who come to watch all its actions, and in most cases, become part of the spectacle themselves.

¹ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 25.

² Sandoval and Abad, *Sports and the Filipino: A Love Affair*, 3-4.

The Filipinos, essentially, were introduced to basketball as spectators. The local population, it is said, learned the basics of the game by watching US soldiers put their rifles aside to shoot hoops as a recreational activity during the American colonial period.³ Soon, the curious onlookers started to cheer for local players as some Filipinos eventually learned to play the game. In a few years, basketball was introduced in schools and after ten years it was already a major crowd-drawer in intercollegiate tournaments. When the national teams made a name for themselves, first in Asian regional tournaments and later in major international competitions, the strong nationalist sentiments that came with each victory has turned the entire country into a huge cheering squad. Since the mid-1970s, the rise of mass media had transformed basketball into an important aspect of local popular culture increasing and spreading its appeal further beyond the arena. Throughout these years, the basketball followers – and its various manifestations as spectators, supporters, viewers, groupies, fans, hecklers, and hooligans – have continuously played an important role in making basketball an integral aspect of the Filipino everyday life.

This chapter tries to get a view of the historical and social significance of basketball in the Philippines from the perspective of the sport fans during the last decade of the twentieth century, a period that is largely considered as the golden age of professional basketball in the Philippines. Generally, the chapter contends that the popularity of basketball in the Philippines partly hinges on the sport's evolution into a subaltern spectacle where the struggles of ordinary Filipinos are symbolically played out. By “rooting for the underdog”, the local basketball followers are, clearly, not only cheering

³ James Naismith, *Basketball – Its Origins and Development*, 47.

for their favorite team but are also rooting for themselves, and for the many other real underdogs outside the playing court.

The chapter focuses on the case of Ginebra, more popularly known in the PBA (Philippine Basketball Association) as the “team of the masses” for its strong fan appeal, especially among the basketball followers from the lower rung of Philippine society. The discussion is mainly divided into three parts: the first section tries to relate basketball with the practice of cockfighting, a form of entertainment and gambling that was prevalent during the Spanish colonial regime in the Philippines. The “fowl game” is often referred to as the predecessor of basketball since it was the most popular public spectacle in the country before the introduction of modern sports at the turn of the twentieth century. The following two sub-sections center on a textual analysis of a couple of novelty songs that portray the sentiments of an avid basketball follower. The object of the fans’ affection is, of course, Barangay Ginebra. The songs, *Kapag Natatalo ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Loses) and *Kapag Nananalo ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Wins) came out together as part of one record album during its celebrated championship run in 1997, when both tunes became the “national anthem” for the team’s millions of fans.⁴ Although the songs are riddled with hyperbolic representations and other lyrical narratives, they, nonetheless, reflect the devotion and passion that many Filipinos have for their favorite pastime. As texts, these two popular songs can help us unravel the entanglements that bind basketball and culture so closely together.

⁴ Gary Granada, *Kapag Natatalo ang Ginebra*, and Bayang Barrios, *Kapag Nanalo ang Ginebra*, Backdoor Records, 1997. Retrieved January 5, 2009. <http://www.ginebraonline.com/forums/index.php?action=printpage;topic=910.0>.

FROM FOWL GAME TO FOUL TEAM

Although, basketball only came to the Philippines at the turn of the last century, spectatorship, obviously, has been around long before the rules of any modern sports have been codified. In prehistoric times, harvest festivals and other important community events provided opportunities for people to come together to participate and witnessed various forms of competitions and other attractions. Much of these practices had remained even during the Spanish colonial period although they were often infused with new meanings that were associated with the hegemonic Roman Catholic religion.⁵ A common public spectacle that has largely thrived under the friar-dominated Spanish regime was the popular pastime of cockfighting. A couple of writers dealing with the history of sports in the Philippines before the twentieth century often referred to the cockpit as the site of ubiquitous public spectacle that can now be largely observed in the basketball hardcourt. After a determined attempts by the American administration to counter the influence of the traditional fowl game after seeing it as a degenerating vice and a source of other social evils, Public Instruction Director David Barrows mused at the widespread popularity of US athletics and noted how the “old sport of cockfighting and gaming have failed to interest the rising generation”.⁶

⁵ Reinhard Wendt, “Philippine Fiesta and Colonial Rule,” *Philippine Studies* Vol. 46, No. 1, (First Quarter, 1998): 3-23.

⁶ David P. Barrows, *A Decade of American Government in the Philippines*. For more recent writings, see Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*; Joseph A. Reaves, *Taking a Game*; and Ylanan and Ylanan, *The History and Development of Physical Education in the Philippines*.

Diversion and Defiance in Colonial Pastime

Apart from being big-time crowd drawers, both the cockpit and hardcourt are largely deemed as subaltern spaces where the thrill of subversion and the possibilities of emancipation becomes a fleeting experience for the subjugated subject. Filomeno Aguilar, Jr., in his insightful work on the social significance of cockfighting in Spanish Philippines, sees in the popular gambling activity the ludic incarnation of the “clash of spirits”. This concept pertains to the “overlapping world of the indigenous and the colonial” that often results in the “cultural entrapment” of the local people. The latter tries to evade the fatal consequences of their captivity through a calculated two-step of submission and resistance.⁷ In the same way, professional basketball, especially during its heights in the 1990s, was often seen as a microcosm of Philippine society where the struggles of the people against the prevailing political and economic forces that were corrosively impacting their everyday lives were symbolically contested in the hardcourt.⁸

Moreover, aside from their appeal as fleeting spectacles, the cockpit and the hardcourt also entice people with a promise of a more lasting solution to their predicaments. Gambling, though largely deemed as the undesirable underside of sport, allows people to dream, and to hope for a better life that seems to be impossible to achieve through the usual channels. For instance, despite the wholesome image that basketball, and especially the country’s professional league is trying to cultivate, “ending”, an illegal gambling activity based on the results of the PBA games came to prominence in the 1990s. “Ending” was particularly popular in the countryside and among the lower class

⁷ Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr., *Clash of Spirits*, 47.

⁸ Noli Eala, *The Philippines’ Basketball League*.

despite the strict government policy that prohibits its practice. This case reflects the position of cockfighting during the Spanish period when the rationalities held by the people of the game had largely remained incomprehensible for the prevailing system. Hence, just as today's hardcourt, "[t]he internal message of the cockpit", according to Aguilar, "was counterhegemonic." He explained:

The indigenous red [color generally used to represent the native] was not the underdog; it could be asserted and bet on as the favorite by the real underdogs outside the cockpit. Red could win, but so could white [the fair-skinned Spanish colonizer]. Since the outcome was never truly predictable, the native at least had an imaginary fifty-fifty chance. And so whenever red and white clashed in the arena, the power encounter between the indigenous and the Hispanic realms was reenacted all over again... as though the historical outcome was totally unknown.⁹

The general description of the phenomenon of basketball fanaticism pertinently mirrored the subaltern qualities of cockfighting in the Philippines that has been laid out in Aguilar's work. For example, Recah Trinidad, a Filipino sport journalist, pointed out how basketball was a "bad match" to the Filipinos because of their generally small physique and the game's origin as a winter game, which runs contrary to the country's tropical climate. With these impressions, Trinidad suggested that the Filipinos insistence to play and follow basketball was, in fact, a reflection of their long-established propensity for "defiance". He explained:

There is [a] deep within the Pinoy [Filipino] cager... the heart of a rebel. And nothing could be sweeter, blood-pumping than to see our cager sneaking up and gracefully propelling himself in the air and scoring a basket against a tall, hulking foreign foe. The ritual of defiance started in Cebu. If Lapu-Lapu, shorter and with inferior artillery, was able to topple and kill the imperious Ferdinand Magellan (considered as the Western "discoverer" of the Philippines), why can't our basketeer be allowed to relive and relished memories of the triumph at Mactan on the hardcourt?¹⁰

⁹ Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr. *Clash of Spirits*, 49.

¹⁰ Recah Trinidad, *Basketball is Not The Name of The Game*, 5.

The reference to the Battle of Mactan in 1521 was an attempt to locate basketball in the larger narrative of the country's history of struggle against foreign aggressions. The defeat of the superior Spanish imperial forces by the native warriors led by Lapu-Lapu (a chieftain in Mactan, a small island off Cebu in central Philippines) becomes an inspiration for the "small" Filipinos in their forays into the "game of the giants". In contemporary basketball competitions, the dichotomy, however, moved from a distinguishable native-foreign or colony-empire binary into a haze of interchangeable counterfactualities. With the absence of an immediately identifiable antagonist, the red-white distinction that characterizes the colonial cockfight becomes a blurred montage of identification and representation. Often, identifying which team is the underdog may vary according to different factors, such as the composition of players, the venue of the game, or the overall image that the team tries to project.

Aside from these factors, the general social background of its followers had also played an important role in determining the position of a particular team in the underdog-superior binary. This trend follows the larger shift in Philippine society where the foreign-native dichotomy during the colonial period has been replaced by the current division between the two major social classes: the elites and the masses. The PBA, the premier cockpit of the most popular spectator event in the country in the past three decades, becomes the sight of this contemporary "clash of spirits." Although all the teams have supporters from both sides of the social divide, each club tends to appeal more to certain groups of fans because of several factors such as the consumer product that they represent (PBA teams are named after their sponsors), the social background of its

prominent players, and most importantly, the club's winning record and the type of basketball techniques that they play.

The Team of the Masses

During the early years of the country's premier basketball league, this elites-masses binary was evident in the historic rivalry of its two most popular teams: Toyota and Crispa. The Toyota Super Corollas generally appealed more to the upper class, primarily because their prominent players were *mestizos* (Spanish-Filipino or Filipino-American), who usually belonged to or identified with those in the top crust of Philippine society. In addition, the team products of the car company that sponsored the team were beyond the reach of many poor Filipinos. In contrast, the Crispa Redmanizers were perceived to be the team of the masses because of the working-class or provincial origins of its players. The company that supports the team also manufactures cheap, mass-produced clothing that were mainly marketed to lower class consumers.

Both Crispa and Toyota disbanded during the economic turmoil that engulfed the country in the mid-1980s. Among the number of teams that emerged to take their place, the Ginebra¹¹ franchise has been the most successful. Although the club has been in the PBA since 1979, it was only during the heights of the league's popularity in the 1990s when Ginebra also came to prominence as the crowd favorite in almost every game that they played. Unlike, Crispa and Toyota, however, the team's popularity was not built on a remarkable winning record or the exceptional talent of its players. After spending less

¹¹ Gilbey's Gin, St. George Whiskies, Añejo Rum 65s, Gordon's Gin Boars, and Barangay Ginebra Gin Kings.

than 10 years in the PBA, Crispa amassed a total of 13 championships while Toyota ran away with nine. On the other hand, Ginebra only won the top prize eight times in its 30 years of existence in the country's premier league. Ginebra's limited success can directly be attributed to the overall talents of its players. Compared to its legendary predecessors that were virtually composed of basketball superstars,¹² the team was basically a rag-tag squad of marginal stars and role players.

How did Ginebra, then, become the most popular team in the PBA in the past two decades given its unremarkable winning record? The answer lies in the type of basketball that they play. The team was well known for its sneaky victories that were anchored on run-and-gun plays and bruising defense, which was proven to be tremendously appealing to the fans. Despite having only marginal players during most of the seasons in the 1990s, they more than made up for it with their toughness and audacity. The team's overall "fighting it out till the end" approach and their propensity to win (or lose) close games had gained for the club numerous loyal supporters. Most of these avid fans belong to the lower rung of Philippine society who can relate to their blue-collar style of play. The team's color, however, is red and it was an easy reminder of the scarlet fighting cock that represents the natives, the social underdog in the Spanish colonial society. Thus, because of their overall "never-say-die" style of play that afforded them a huge number of followers despite their mediocre winning record, Ginebra came to be known in the PBA as "the perennial underdog team" and, consequently, as "the team of the masses".

¹² As a testament to this fact, almost half of the 25 all-time best players chosen for the PBA's 25th Anniversary in 1999 were from Crispa and Toyota. See Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*.

Play Basketball and Be a Senator

A discussion on the Ginebra team would not be complete if the name Robert Jaworski is not mentioned. Arguably, the most popular Filipino basketball player ever, the highly charismatic Jaworski joined the team from the defunct Toyota club in 1984.¹³ Although still highly admired by many fans, the “Big J” was already at the downside of his productive years when he joined Ginebra at the age of 38. Apart from his advancing age, Jaworski was never considered to be an exceptionally talented basketeer even when he was at the peak of his career. “As a player,” according to a fellow PBA star, “Sonny (Jaworki’s nickname) is ordinary, *walang* specialty (he has no special basketball skills). It’s his heart, his spirit that matters.”¹⁴ He brought to the team the toughness and fighting spirit that he was known for during his heydays playing for the famed Toyota franchise. For instance, Ginebra’s unrelenting style of play first caught the attention of the Filipino fans in a game in 1985 when Jaworski had to be rushed to a hospital because of an injury. Instead of just calling it a day, he decided to return to the arena after getting treatment. With their opponent enjoying a sizeable lead late in the game, Jaworski’s decision to return to the game despite the injury that he sustained inspired his team and they rallied for a dramatic victory that resulted in a wild celebration among the spectators. Just as the Battle of Mactan to Philippine nationalism, this event became the watershed of the Ginebra’s status as one most celebrated team in the history of basketball in the country.

In 1986, team management recognized Jaworski’s good leadership qualities and appointed him as their playing-coach. He remained in that position until his retirement

¹³ Born of a Polish-American father and a Filipino mother.

¹⁴ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 101.

from the league in 1998. However, even as a coach, Jaworski was not really known for his basketball acumen. A fellow PBA coach noted that he was really “not technical and scientific”... but “knew how to draw the most from his players”. He added, “[t]he one thing you knew about Sonny Jaworski’s teams is that they came out and played hard every night.”¹⁵ Two years later, he led his group to win the league’s All-Filipino championship. The team’s achievement became one of the main stories of the 1988 PBA Annual yearbook where Jaworski’s was recognized for “steering an Añejo (Ginebra used this name that year) squad that had no full-fledged superstar... With only a big fighting heart as high-octane fuel Añejo rode on the sheer madness of crowd support to beat the highly-favored Purefoods (team)” in the finals.¹⁶ His remarkable career spanned more than two decades; from 1975, until his final game in 1997 when he was already 51 years old. This achievement is viewed as an exceptional display of longevity that is almost impossible to replicate in the grueling world of professional basketball. “The Living Legend”, as Jaworski was fondly called, reluctantly left the PBA in 1998 after he was able to parley his popularity to get himself elected as a Senator, a position he served until 2004.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 178.

¹⁶ Al S. Mendoza, “PBA 88: A Big Smashing Party,” *PBA Annuals 88-89*, (Pasig City: Philippine Basketball Association, 1989): 10.

¹⁷ Jaworski followed the footsteps of Ambrosio Padilla and Freddie Webb, former national basketball players who later served as senators of the Republic of the Philippines. Padilla, the captain of 1936 Philippine Team, which placed fifth in the Berlin Olympics was elected in 1957. Webb was part of the 1972 National Team, which participated in the Munich Olympics, he was elected as a senator in 1992.

The Team of Fouls

Despite their relative success in the PBA, Ginebra also received its fair share of criticisms. Particularly, their rough defensive style had been repeatedly denounced for bordering into something outright dirty and unsportsmanlike. The analysis of the Ginebra's defense at the end of the 1989 PBA begins with this line: the team likes "to make you feel their defense. They play it rugged and physical. [The team] intimidates, threatens, scares but gets the job done."¹⁸ One of their well-known players, Rudy Distrito was nicknamed "The Destroyer", for his feared defensive tactics that had a couple of opposing players end up in the injured list. Hence, the "people's team" was also known as the "team of fouls" for its proclivity to commit excessive physical contacts against their opponents. Furthermore, Ginebra, the team's name, was also the brand of the best-selling gin in the country was proven to be both a boon and a bane to Ginebra. While the popularity of the alcoholic drink across the country enabled them to connect with the ordinary Filipino fans, the association with the intoxicating spirit has also highlighted their tendency for violence and rowdiness. This negative image was easily taken as a reflection of the socially disruptive behavior of the "uncivilized" masses that Ginebra tried to connect with as the PBA's "perennial underdog team".

WHEN GINEBRA LOSES:

THE SUBALTERN STRUGGLE AS A SPECTACLE

In the same way, trying to understand the phenomenal popularity of Ginebra, and more generally, the profound influence of basketball in the everyday life of most Filipinos, has

¹⁸ Joaquin Henson, "Team Profiles," *PBA Annuals 88-89*, (Quezon City: Philippine Basketball Association, 1989): 48.

also proven to be quite intoxicating. Alexander Wolff, a well-known American basketball writer, described his observation of the widespread practice and following of basketball in the Philippines simply as “madness”.¹⁹ Indeed, the term fans, which is being used here interchangeably with spectators, supporters, and followers – refers to the “emotionally committed ‘consumer’ of sport events”²⁰ that is generally viewed as “an obsessed individual: someone who has an intense interest in a certain team” or celebrity.²¹ Nevertheless, despite the apparent irrationality of their actions, the study of fandom reveals a perceptive view not only about the contours of basketball as a “hegemonic sporting culture”²² but also of the larger cultural landscape of the society where it is situated.

Particularly, due to Ginebra’s widespread popularity as the “team of the masses,” an examination of the experience and rationalities of its loyal fans can reveal certain points that can help us understand the phenomenological popularity of basketball in the Philippines. Since, “spectators not only watch games but also identify with the team themselves,”²³ they can provide something that Iletto would call as an “opportunity to study the workings of the popular mind”.²⁴ With these assumptions, the study looks into two novelty songs, which was written as Ginebra’s “fan anthem” during its celebrated championship run in 1997. These songs can be interesting sources of valuable insights

¹⁹ Alexander Wolff, *Big Game, Small World: A Basketball Adventure*, (New York: Warner Books, 2002).

²⁰ Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 6.

²¹ Garry Crawford, *Consuming Sport*.

²² Markovits and Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*.

²³ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 31.

²⁴ Reynaldo Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979): 11.

into the mentality and the worldview of basketball's most avid followers. Essentially, they can form a basis for a phenomenological analysis of the historical and social significance of this sport in the Philippines.

The first song *Kapag Natatalo Ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Loses) was written and recorded by Gary Granada, a multi-awarded local folk singer who is a self-confessed Ginebra fan. The song, generally, reflects the sentiment of a male follower who demonstrates a strong attachment to his favorite team. It relates his experience of watching one of the usual jam-packed venues that was a common sight in every Ginebra game. The song was written in Filipino but the author's English translation is written beside the text for reference. Its melodic and lyric structure follows the one of a professional basketball game, with the verses written to follow a chronological categorization; from the opening quarters, to the second half, with the momentum gradually building up to the last few minutes of play.

<i>Sinusundan ko ang bawat laro</i>	I follow every game
<i>Ng koponan kong naghihingalo</i>	Of my struggling team
<i>Sa bawat bolang binibitaw</i>	In every ball that they try to shoot
<i>Di mapigilang mapapasigaw</i>	I can't help it, the excitement makes me shout
<i>Kahit hindi relihiyoso</i>	Even if I am not really religious
<i>Naaalala ko ang mga santo</i>	I remember to call on the saints
<i>O San Miguel, Santa Lucia</i>	O Saint Michael, O Saint Lucy
<i>Sana manalo ang Ginebra</i>	I pray that Ginebra wins

Here, the fan basically relates how he tries to *religiously* attend every match that Ginebra plays. He is like a faithful follower who was enchantingly attracted to the rituals of the game, the veneration of athlete-heroes, and the celebration of one's identity as part of a

larger congregation. Allen Guttman in his seminal work, *Sport Spectators*, noted how fans “experience something akin to worship.”²⁵ In fact, the general tendency of equating sport following to religion has been a common opinion that reflects the tremendous influence of sports on many people in the contemporary world. The same was true with basketball in the Philippines in the 1990s, and for sure, even now. According to Ricah Trinidad, a local sportswriter: “Today’s Filipino is basically a man of two religions. He is a god-fearing Christian and an irrepressible basketball devotee.” He added, “[w]hile he makes it a point to attend Sunday Mass, at times rather reluctantly, he willingly worships through most of the week in the national basketball temple or at his very home before the TV.”²⁶ In the song, the faithfulness of the fan to his favorite team was shown at how he continued to attend their games even if they were already struggling to win.

Apparently, there is a sense of imbalance in this Christian-basketball fan dualism that Trinidad argued as part of the Filipino religiosity. The character in the songs readily admits that he is not really *relihiyoso* (religious) but nonetheless, calls on the saints to ask for their intercessions so Ginebra would win the game. Wittily, San Miguel and Sta. Lucia, refer not only to the venerated Catholic figures, but are also names of other clubs playing in the PBA. The former is a team owned by the San Miguel Corporation, the Philippines’ largest conglomerate whose flagship enterprise is the manufacturing of beer. On the other hand, Sta. Lucia is named after its sponsor, one of the biggest real estate developers in the country. This comical play of words reflects the ubiquitous presence of

²⁵ Allen Guttman, *Sport Spectators*, 178.

²⁶ Ricah Trinidad, *Basketball is Not The Name of The Game*, 4-5.

religious symbols and the prominent location of the Catholic Church in Philippine society.

On the whole, religion, either literally as Catholicism or metaphorically as basketball – was a refuge, especially for the many Filipinos whose capabilities to shield themselves from the vagaries of everyday life are limited. The coliseum, just like the church, provided for the basketball fan a sense of community and belonging, an inspiration from rituals that celebrate suffering and sacrifice, and a promise that underdogs will have a chance to redeem themselves in the end. In addition, both were just some of the few places in this knowledge-driven age where science or even rational thinking is not necessary in order to make sense of the world.

*Sa Coliseum at Astrodome
Nakikisiksikan hanggang bubong
Nang-aalaska at nanggugulo
Pag nagifree throw ang katalo
Ang barangay ay nagdiriwang
Halftime ay kinse ang lamang
Cameraman, huwag mo lang kukunan
Si senador at congressman*

In the Coliseum and Astrodome, they're filled to the rafters but I still squeezed in
Taunting and trying to disrupt
An opposing player's free throw shot
The *barangay* (fans) started to celebrate
We are already ahead by 15 at halftime
But cameraman, just don't take the shots
of senator and congressman

If the basketball is, indeed, a religion, its games are far from mere solemn rituals. On the contrary, they resemble a major *fiesta* (feastday celebration) where the crowd, the revelry, and the overall atmosphere of gaiety prevail. In fact, the cheering and taunting borders and occasionally spills over to raucous celebration and hostility towards the opposing players and fans. However, the confrontations rarely result in violence that is peculiar among football fans in Europe. One of the main reasons for the absence of

hooliganism lies in the nature of fandom in the PBA. Since the teams are not rooted in a particular city or province, the connection among its fans was merely held together by their *symbolic* interest in a particular team and not by a *real* bond that results from a common ethnic background, geographical identification, or simply from the interlocking experience of neighbors.

For instance, the word *barangay* mentioned in the fifth line of the verse refers to the smallest political unit in the Philippines, often a cluster of small villages noted for its long tradition (albeit fading) of strong communitarian practices. However, this term has also been used since the 1990s to refer to the throng of loyal fans that comes to support the Ginebra team in its every match. The characterization became very popular that the team officially changed its name to Barangay Ginebra in 1999. The *barangay* in the context of fandom in the PBA, therefore, is utterly an “imagined community”²⁷ rather than a real locality marked by a defined set of boundaries. This absence of geographical rootedness spared the league’s fans of the inherent animosity between localities that is brought about by history of conflicts and other forms of rivalry, both real and imagined. More often, the taunting and the disruptive behaviors mentioned in the song were largely done not to invite a fight with the rival fans but to provoke aggression and a more physical contest between the opposing players. Hence, just like the colonial cockfight, violence mostly remained a spectacle rather than something that one would like to participate in.

²⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1991). For a discussion on the relevance of Anderson’s ideas in sports, see Rex Nash, “Contestation in Modern English Professional Football: The Independent Supporters Association Movement,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (2000): 465-86.

Moreover, a number of studies have underscored how modern sports offer a sense of belonging that is increasingly fading in other aspects of contemporary life.²⁸ In his seminal work, *Consuming Sport*, Crawford suggests that “‘traditional’ sources of community have begun to decline, such as those based upon family and local networks, the sense of community offered by contemporary sport becomes increasingly important.”²⁹ Thus, the Ginebra fan’s affiliation to the team is a way of dealing with “the incongruencies of a world seeking more freedom whilst lamenting the loss of a secure world.”³⁰

Apart from basketball, following the spectacles surrounding its electoral politics has long been a favorite pastime in the Philippines.³¹ The PBA, as the last part of the stanza suggests, enables these two attractions to converge. In the 1990s, the widespread popularity of the country’s premier league caught the attention of the nation’s political leaders who eventually became regular fixtures in its games. One of the most notable attendees was former President Joseph Estrada who, during that decade, made a remarkable ascent from senator to vice-president before making it all the way to Malacañang (the official Presidential Residence) largely by presenting himself as “the hero of the masses”.

²⁸ Tim Delaney, *Community, Sport and Leisure*, (New York: Legend Books, 2001). Also see, Chris Stone, “The Role of Football in Everyday Life,” in Sean Brown (ed.) *Football Fans Around The World: From Supporters To Fanatics*, (London: Routledge, 2007): 7-22.

²⁹ Gary Crawford, *Consuming Sport*, 52.

³⁰ Sean Brown, *Football Fans Around the World*, 17.

³¹ Wilhelmina Paras, “A Nation Hooked on Hoops: For Filipinos, It’s the Top Game after Politics,” *Asiaweek*, (October 24, 1997): 47.

Just like Estrada whose family owned a professional basketball team for a time, many of the politicians who made conspicuous visits during the matches were true basketball fans. However, it was quite apparent that despite their interest in the sport, they came to the coliseum primarily for public exposure to attract the attention of live spectators and television audiences who constituted a large chunk of the voting population. As expected, the league officials openly welcomed these VIPs because their presence helped to raise and legitimize PBA's status as one of the country's top sport attractions. Most of the fans, however, thought that their limelight-grabbing presence merely desecrates their hallowed coliseum with excessive politicking, which is associated with corruption and the overall moral decay that were dragging the entire country into a deep social crisis. Thus, the verse ended with the fan pleading to the cameraman not to take a shot of the senator and the congressman who came to see the game.

<i>Pagbigyan nyo na ako</i>	Just let me do this
<i>Paminsan-minsan lang ito</i>	It's only once in a while
<i>Gumaang nabibigatang puso</i>	To lighten up my burdened heart
<i>Pagbigyan nyo na ako</i>	Just let me do this
<i>Sa munting hilig kong ito</i>	This small pastime that I love to do
<i>Kung hindi baka mag-away pa tayó</i>	Or, we might just end up in a quarrel

The refrain shows the main character's awareness of the eccentricity of his preoccupation with the Ginebra team. This is the reason why he is pleading others not to mind his actions. Ironically, his appeal for consideration and sympathy reflects the fan's marginal position despite the overall popularity of basketball in the Philippines. A second look, however, reveals that the protagonist no longer sees himself as a great fan in this part of the song. Rather, he now speaks as an ordinary individual who considers his passion in

watching Ginebra games as a simple pastime. A diversion that temporarily takes him away from the everyday grind of life and the worries of an unforeseeable future.

*Nang 2nd half ay nag-umpisa
Puro palpak ang tira nila
Offensive foul si Noli Locsin
At si Gayoso na-travelling
Sa kakaibang shorts ni Jaworski
Ay ipinasok ang sarili
Kalagitnaan ng 4th quarter
Tabla ang score 88-all*

When the 2nd half started
All their shots came up short
Noli Locsin was called for an offensive foul
And Gayoso was charged for illegal travelling
In his old-fashioned shorts, Jaworski
Put himself in to play the game
In the middle of 4th quarter
The score is tied, 88-all

*Drive ni Pido ay nasupalpal
Defense nila na-technical
Parang gumuho and aking daigdig
Nang maagawan si Bal David
Nang bumusina ng last 2 minutes
3 points ni Hizon ay nagmintis
Kunsumisyon ay nagpatong-patong
Graduate si Marlou at si Ong*

Pido's driving shot was block
Then, they were called for defensive violation
My world seemed to crumble down
When the ball was stolen from Bal David
Just before the last-2-minute horn sounded
Hizon missed his 3-point shot
My problems started to pile up high
When Marlou and Ong got fouled out

These parts of the song illustrate the actions happening in the second half of a basketball game when the contest is supposed to intensify and becomes more exciting for the spectators. The fan's account features some of the most prominent Ginebra players from their celebrated 1997 PBA Commissioner's Cup championship team. However, instead of doing heroic maneuvers to give their team the victory, they altogether fumbled their plays, started to miss their shots, had their ball passes intercepted, and committed all sort of game violations. Apart from being a *basketballesque* dramaticization of a subaltern struggle, the verses also portray how the fans could identify with the difficulties that their basketball heroes were suffering. Thus the lyrics describe how the protagonist's world came "crumbling down" after the ball was stolen from Bal David, the team's most skillful dribbler or how his "problems started to pile up" when Marlou Aquino and

Wilmer Ong, their best defenders, were disqualified from playing during the rest of the game after reaching the given foul limit of six.

Just as the cockfight, the basketball game turns into, what Aguilar would call as a “liminal period.” A moment of disjuncture when “history and social structure can be momentarily suspended and phenomenologically forgotten as players... that make for a pure fantastic entertainment.”³² Sporting spectacles such as basketball are diversions not necessarily because they make their spectators momentarily forget about their troubles. Rather, they take their fans away from the anger, joy and grief of everyday life by making them feel that their burdens are shared, albeit symbolically, by the heroes of the hardcourt. A Ginebra game, therefore, is a *spectacle of subaltern struggle* where the hardships of an underdog team courageously fighting it out against a more formidable opponent became an exciting public attraction.

Pagbigyan nyo na ako
Paminsan-minsan lang ito
Gumaang nabibigatang puso
Pagbigyan nyo na ako
Kahit na kahit paano
Sumaya ng bahagya itong mundo

Just let me do this
It's only once in a while
To lighten up my burdened heart
Just let me do this
Regardless, in whatever way
It will make my world a little brighter

The changes in the refrain's last two lines altered the song's overall tone from confrontational to something that implores sympathy. The mood swing reflects the fluctuation of the spectator's emotional balance as he goes along with the exciting flow of the game. As a “fanatic”, engaged in some kind of “madness”, the avid basketball

³² Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr., *Clash of Spirits*, 49.

follower experiences some lucid moments that allows him to come to his senses. Just like the downbeat tone of the refrain, a fast-paced basketball game is also interspersed with timely breaks set for the quarterly huddles, halftime shows, and momentum-altering timeouts that give both players and fans opportunities to put all the actions in perspective.

<i>24 seconds, lamang ng lima</i>	with 24 seconds left, the opponents are
<i>ang kalaban, bola pa nila</i>	5 points ahead and they have ball possession
<i>Dumudilim ang aking paningin</i>	My vision is dimming in anger
<i>Ang tenga ko nagpapanting</i>	My ears are ringing with rage
<i>Bumabalik sa aking isip</i>	Someone comes back to mind
<i>Ang nakaaway ko noong Grade 6</i>	That boy I had a fight with in Grade 6
<i>Parang gusto ko nang magkagiyera</i>	I feel like there should be a war
<i>Pag natatalo ang Ginebra</i>	Whenever Ginebra losses

From a brief period of calmness, the mood of the spectator again swings back to that of an aggressive and belligerent fan. Fuming at the sight of his team that was already in the verge of losing, his anger even brought back memories of a boy he had a fight with a long time back, when he was still in primary school. This nostalgic reconstruction of his frustration with his beloved team's pending defeat points to the deeper meaning to what is, hitherto, an unremarkable experience. In a larger context, this episode resonates Trinidad's argument about the primordial link of Philippine basketball to the 16th-century Battle of Mactan as a symbol of "defiance" against external aggression.³³ With a simple act of remembering, an ordinary incident becomes an intrinsic aspect of one's biography just as an isolated event was readily made part of history. The fan's sentiment reflects how the subaltern struggle is often driven by repressed emotions and subconscious desires that are occasionally awakened under extreme circumstances.

³³ Ricah Trinidad, *Basketball is Not The Name of The Game*.

*Galit ako sa mga pasista
Galit ako sa mga imperyalista
Feel na feel kong maging aktibista
Pag natatalo ang Ginebra*

I hate the fascists
I hate the imperialists
I really want to become an activist
Whenever Ginebra losses

The coda presents a more contemporary form of defiance that is turning into a common occurrence especially with the growing public displeasure over the dysfunctional state of governance in the country. For instance, the first two lines mirror the usual content of protest placards or mass demonstration speeches. However, these slogans does not only call for reforms in the Philippine government but more deliberately express the objection of many Filipinos to the long-standing alliance of the country with the United States, which they believe is exploitative and, as the lines say, was “fascist” and “imperialist”. In this instance, basketball, which is largely considered as a symbol and concrete manifestation of American imperialism, ironically becomes a venue for its subversion.

WHEN GINEBRA WINS:

SPORT VICTORY AS SYMBOLIC EMANCIPATION

The second piece, *Kapag Nananalo Ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Wins) was also written by Gary Granada but the vocals was rendered by Bayang Barrios, a well-acclaimed female folk singer in the Philippines. Her performance shows how sports fandom, a practice long associated with masculinity, has crossed the gender divide and increasingly captures the interest of many female basketball fans. Evidently, the song was composed as the more optimistic rendering of the first one; the intro and refrain were retained and

the rest of the lyrics merely provided the other side of the story that was narrated in Granada's version.

<i>Sinusundan ko ang bawat laro</i>	I follow every game
<i>Ng kopyon kong naghihingalo</i>	Of my struggling team
<i>Sa bawat bolong binibitaw</i>	In every ball that they try to shoot
<i>Di mapigilang mapapasigaw</i>	I can't help it, the excitement makes me shout
<i>Kahit hindi relihiyoso</i>	Even if I am not really religious
<i>Naaalala ko ang mga santo</i>	I remember to call on the saints
<i>O San Miguel, Santa Lucia</i>	O Saint Michael, O Saint Lucy
<i>Sana manalo ang Ginebra</i>	I pray that Ginebra wins

The previous discussion of these verses mainly used religion as a metaphor to explain the “devotion” of the Ginebra fans, their favorite team. However, apart from finding “spiritual refuge” in the coliseum, there are also some other more perceptible reasons that attract people to the team as well as to basketball fandom, in general. The absence of affiliation of the PBA clubs to a particular locality has left them with no immediate support base that is peculiar in professional basketball leagues around the world. Instead, teams largely gather their core of loyal supporters from the employees of their sponsoring companies. Employees, for instance, from the company that manufacture the Ginebra gins, often have access to free or discounted tickets that allow them to attend games. In most cases, the company even provides uniforms, banners, and other cheering materials that distinguish them from the other supporters during Ginebra matches. This practice reflects Wolff's observation in Japan “where workers at Nippon Express (company that owns a baseball club)... dutifully filled the stands and sang the company anthem” during home games.³⁴ It demonstrates the origin of the PBA as an amateur industrial league,

³⁴ Alexander Wolff, *Big Game, Small World*, 305.

which was organized to promote physical fitness among factory workers as well as to provide entertainment to offset the drudgery of working in the assembly lines.

Apart from having a more direct affiliation with the team, the employee/fans also formed an actual community that is forged by the shared-experience of its members as fellow workers, or as long-term supporters who occupy the same spot in the rafters. They served as the core residents of the *barangay*, the imaginary village that refers to the large number of followers who flocked to watch Ginebra's every games. The energy of the cheering crowd often emanates from the core group and reverberates around the coliseum throughout most of the contest. With the incomparable support from the *barangay*, the team, in effect, enjoys a "homecourt advantage" in each of their matches. Thus, the reference to the other teams/companies (i.e. San Miguel, Sta. Lucia) portrayed how boundaries were defined and identities were marked out in a league that lacked the usual categories of differentiation (e.g. community or regional affiliation).

<i>Ngunit ang aga nilang nagkalat</i>	But they started to fumble early on
<i>Bawat diskarte nasisilat</i>	They were out-maneuvered in their every move
<i>Nagkakasundo kaming magkakampi</i>	I agreed with my fellow spectators
<i>Na ang labo kasi ng referee</i>	That the referees are cheating us
<i>Ang barangay parang napeste</i>	The <i>barangay</i> looked pestilence-stricken
<i>Natambakan agad kami ng bente</i>	We were quickly behind by 20 points
<i>Parang bansa'y nagkaleche-leche</i>	The nation seems to suffer a series of disaster
<i>At nare-elect ang presidente</i>	And the President was reelected

This stanza shows how the spirit of the *barangay* traveled from the anxious fans to the fumbling team before it bounced far enough to generally represent the different social problems that are perceived as essential obstacles necessary to strengthen the nation. The

first two lines is a common depiction of a subaltern struggle, which served as the launching point to introduce the characters and the storyline of a soap opera. It lays down the baseline condition of poverty, affliction and suffering from where the heroes would rise to liberate themselves and their respective communities from a long period of suffering and oppression. The song reflexively appropriates the initial bad plays that beset his/her team to symbolize the deepening crisis that falls on the nation. To add more drama, the subsequent lines even suggest how the referees conspired to make the situation more difficult for the team. The referees, who were tasked to uphold the rules of the game, ended up committing mistakes that further confounded the predicament of the downtrodden team. In the context of the nation, the ultimate referee is the president who is responsible for the welfare and protection of the people. The failure of the Philippine government to promote a better life for its citizens and its inability to shield them from various social ills has largely been understood as a betrayal of the trust that people has given to him/her. Hence, the verse ended with a portrayal of the reelection of the president as a national disaster (President Ramos, at that time, was heavily criticized for expressing a desire to extend his term).

These early trials, however, is viewed as a temporary condition that merely sets the stage for the rise of the underdog. The Philippines, for instance, is often seen as a young nation (only got full independence in 1946) or as a society which recently emerged from the “dark age” of Marcos dictatorship and is currently enduring an aftermath crisis before finally emerging as a politically stable and economically developed country in the future. The golden age of professional basketball in the 1990s, for instance, was also a time of

great national optimism when the country was dubbed as the new “tiger cub”³⁵ for its remarkable progress. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm was dampened by the 1997 Asian financial crisis and a worsening political crisis after the People Power II forced President Joseph Estrada to step down due to massive corruption charges.

For just as the Ginebra team, underdogs initially get beaten up by the big bad guys before they are able to gather all their remaining energy, fight back, and dramatically prevail over their opponents. When asked about their tendency to win (or lose) in exciting, closely-contested games, Jaworski answered: “I’ve noticed that when we’re the underdogs, that’s when we win the game. *Pag kami naman ang lumamang ng mga* (If we are ahead by let’s say) 19 points, that’s when I feel uneasy. *Kasi nawawala ang* (because we lose the essential) vitamins F and S. You know, Fighting and Spirit (sic).”³⁶

Pagbigyan nyo na ako
Paminsan-minsan lang ito
Gumaang nabibigatang puso
Pagbigyan nyo na ako
Sa munting hilig kong ito
Kung hindi baka mag-away pa tayo

Just let me do this
It’s only once in a while
To lighten up my burdened heart
Just let me do this
This small pastime that I love to do
Or we might just end up in a quarrel

³⁵ Term coined to refer to the countries who had shown promise to follow the industrial growth of the Asian Tigers (South Korea, Hongkong, Taiwan, Singapore) during the Asian Miracle years (1980s-1990s). The Ramos administration even popularly used the slogan, Philippines 2000! To mark the turn of the millennium as the year when the country will achieve the status of a Newly-Industrialized Nation (NIC). Unfortunately, the Asian financial crisis shattered this optimism. See Fidel V. Ramos, *Toward Philippines 2000: A Resurgence of Optimism and Growth*, (Manila: Office of the Press Secretary, 1994).

³⁶ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 101.

The refrain, just like in the previous song, allows the fan to refocus the story from its larger social implications back to her personal sentiments. It presents Ginebra fandom as an engaging pastime that can be consuming, even addictive, making it incomprehensible for other people who are not sports followers. Hence, the main character, in the last two lines, implores others not to mind what she is doing or they might just have a fight. This situation shows that despite its nature as a public leisure interest, sport fandom is also a highly personal pursuit, like a spiritual retreat that enables a person to find solitude. A sports psychologist, Daniel Wann suggests that fandom is a way of escaping and its practice can be “particularly prevalent during personally difficult and/or stressful times. He notes that historically, many individuals have used sport spectating as a diversion during wartime.”³⁷ Hence, rather than just a fleeting pastime, sport fandom can be a form of symbolic emancipation, a form of coping mechanism that enables a person to conquer an overly distressing social condition such as prolonged armed conflicts and abject poverty.

*Nang 2nd half ay nag-umpisa
Nag-umpisa ang ratsada nila
Ipit na pukol ni Noli Locsin
Kahit finoul, pasok pa rin
Ang double-team nila’y walang epekto
Sa alley hoop at alahoy ni Marlou
Sunod-sunod sa magkabilang kanto
3 points ni Hizon at Jarencio*

When the second half started
They also started to play well
One difficult shot of Noli Locsin
Even if he was fouled the ball still went in
Their double-teaming defense has no effect
With Marlou’s alley hoop and tricky shots
Consecutive scores from different corners
3-point shots of Hizon and Jarencio

*Opensa ay nagsaling-saling
Sa hustle ni Macky at Benny Cheng*

The players took turns in scoring
With the hustle of Macky and Benny Cheng

³⁷ Daniel L. Wann, Merrill J. Melnick, Gordon W. Russell, and Dale G. Pease, *Sports Fan: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*, (New York: Routledge, 2001); 39. Also see, Daniel L. Wann, *Sport Psychology*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997).

*Halos ang bola ay di makatawid
Sa mga nakaw ni Flash David
Ang execution ay swabeng-swabe
Sa mga plays ni Coach Jaworski
Biglang umugong ang buong palibot
Mukhang maglalaro na rin si Dudut*

The ball hardly crosses the half-court line
After the interceptions of Flash David
The execution of designed plays was smooth
Under the direction of Coach Jaworski
Then, there were loud cheers in the arena
It seems that Dudut will finally play

The song's lens now refocuses on the hardcourt action as the game moves to the last half of the competition. By this time, the underdog starts to experience a reversal of fortune as the team, finally, was able to make good plays and tries to cut back on the lead of its opponent. Apart from sheer luck, this comeback rally is, of course, achieved through self-sacrifice, teamwork, and unity. In short, the team has once again become a *barangay*, a small community that faces calamities or any other adversities as one cohesive unit of hardworking, unselfish, and dedicated individuals. "The difficult shot of Noli Locsin," "Marlou's alley hoop," "3-point shots of Hizon and Jarencio," "the hustle of Macky and Benny Cheng," "the interceptions of Flash David" and "the plays of Coach Jaworski": these portrayals present the different members of Ginebra who are making use of their individual basketball skills to contribute to the success of the team.

Aside from their cohesiveness, the team has also achieved recognition for their resilience. Ginebra is well-known for not getting discouraged by its opponent's big lead; they became legendary for fighting it out until the game's last buzzer sounded. In the team, no one embodies the word resilience more than Jaworski himself. Among the pioneers who came when the PBA was established in 1975, he was the last one to retire. Three years before he finally hung his jersey in 1998, Ginebra picked his son Robert, Jr. in the second round of the PBA Draft, thereby making an international record for the first father-son

tandem in professional sports. Unfortunately, the two were not able to play at the same time in a game since Robert, Sr., was already at the tail end of his career and had largely concentrated on coaching. On the other hand, Robert, Jr. also did not get a lot of playing time as he still needed more exposure to improve on his play. Many believed, then, that Robert, Jr. was not really good enough to enter the professional league but was drafted, nonetheless, so the father and son tandem could provide more attraction for the league. Thus, the song highlights in the last line of the stanza the wild cheers that erupted from the stands when Robert, Jr. (who is more popularly known as Dudut) was seen to be moving to check into the game.

<i>Pagbigyan nyo na ako</i>	Just let me do this
<i>Paminsan-minsan lang ito</i>	It's only once in a while
<i>Gumaang nabibigatang puso</i>	To lighten up my burdened heart
<i>Pagbigyan nyo na ako</i>	Just let me do this
<i>Kahit na kahit paano</i>	regardless, in whatever way
<i>Sumaya ng bahagya itong mundo</i>	my world will be a little brighter

Just as a last minute timeout, the repetition of the refrain here enables the narrator to take a breather before the crunch time. It is also a reminder that the great deal of passion and energy that radiates from a sporting spectacle emanates from the people themselves, making them as an integral aspect of the attraction.

<i>Tatlong minuto pa ang natitira</i>	There are 3 minutes left in the game
<i>Nang kami ay nakahabol na</i>	When our team finally catches up
<i>Sa isang iglap nagpalit ng score</i>	After a moment there's a change of score
<i>Lamang na kami 99-94</i>	We are already ahead, 99-94
<i>Bumabalik sa aking isip</i>	Someone comes back to mind
<i>Ang manliligaw ko nuong Grade 6</i>	My suitor when I was in Grade 6
<i>Napapatawad ko na ang Alaska</i>	I have already forgiven Alaska
<i>Pag nananalo ang Ginebra</i>	Whenever Ginebra Wins

This part of the song shows the moment when the underdog catches up with the stronger adversary during the last few minutes of the game. Inside the arena, this is a moment of wild frenzy, a climactic period when loud cheers echoes from the live spectators to the millions of TV viewers who watched the game from their homes, in pubs, and in many other places. Quoting from Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, Aguilar describes a cockfighting scene during the Spanish colonial period where "an underdog red's victory became even more emotionally charged and imbued with patriotic fervor: 'a wild shouting greets *sentencia* (the winner's proclamation), a shouting that is heard from all over town, prolonged, uniform, and lasting for some time,' so that everyone, including women and children, would know and share in the rejoicing that the underdog had won over the dominant power." Just like the raucous cheering that comes with the victory of the underdog cock, the chanting of *Ginebra! Ginebra! Ginebra!* allows for "social catharsis at least in the fictive world of gaming".³⁸ Leo Prieto, a former league commissioner sums up the importance of the PBA as a form of popular entertainment. He said: "What else is there for the people besides the PBA? Going to the movies. The games are exciting and people can stay for hours. You get identified with the teams and you are free to insult the referees and call them all kinds of names, get all that pent-up feeling out of your system, which you cannot do in the movie house."³⁹ Thus, the "hoops hysteria" that comes with the triumphant win of the underdog team becomes a symbolic emancipation shared by the many other underdogs outside the basketball court.

³⁸ Filomeno Aguilar, Jr., *Clash of Spirits*, 49

³⁹ Cantor and Barrameda, *PBA: The First 25*, 16.

*O kay ganda ng aking umaga
Feeling ko wala akong asawa
At ang dati kong boyfriend ay hiwalay na
Pag nananalo ang Ginebra*

Oh how lovely is my morning
I feel that I don't have a husband
My ex-boyfriend, I just left him
Whenever Ginebra Wins

The coda is a humorous description of the fan's feelings whenever Ginebra wins. The team's victory gave her a profound sense of freedom that the main character in the song felt that she has liberated herself even from the everyday troubles of keeping a personal relationship. Thus, her joy made her feel like she does not have a husband or has just broke up with her boyfriend. All in all, for many of people, being a basketball follower is not just a fleeting experience that merely disappears as one leaves the arena or turns the TV off after a game. It lingers on, in their imagination, in their conversations, in their relationships, and in their everyday lives.

Apart from winning the 1997 Commissioner's Cup crown in a very exciting fashion, which became the inspiration for the two songs that were discussed earlier, Ginebra also had a couple of celebrated championship runs in 1986 and 1988, as well as a successful come-from-behind victory in the Open Conference Finals in 1991. After the turn of the new millennium, the new-look team, which was anchored by some of the league's best players, won four championships between 2004-2008. This is a remarkable feat that took the previous Ginebra teams 11 years to achieve.

However, despite having superior talents and a vastly improved winning record, the recent team cannot compare to the immense popularity of the Ginebra squads of the late 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps, most of its loyal fans have also retired since the departure of

Jaworski, their beloved hero. Surely, the team has also been affected by the overall decline of the PBA as the premier sporting spectacle in the country with the emergence of other sports such as boxing and billiards, the increasing popularity of American professional basketball, and the rise of local collegiate basketball leagues (see the following chapter for a more elaborate discussion of this trend). More importantly, by having bonafide superstars and dominant performances, Ginebra has become too good to be a “perennial underdog squad,” and, consequently, has slowly lost its image as the “team of the masses”. Moreover, the waning popularity of Ginebra was also reflective of the overall decline of the PBA, which came as part of the overall social upheaval that was brought about by the advent of globalization at the turn of the millennium. The succeeding chapter will cast the spotlight on this crucial period of transition.

CHAPTER SIX

BASKETBALL WITHOUT BORDERS

The National Sport in the Global Arena

“Everybody Should Visit Manila”, US basketball star Gilbert Arenas eagerly announced in his blog in July 2008. The piece was about his off-season world tour that brought him to the Philippine capital along with other stops in Beijing, Shanghai, Berlin, and Barcelona to promote a new line of sporting apparel. Among these places, he highlighted his experience in Manila as the most memorable. “They made me feel like an NBA star,” was how he put together his appreciation for the well-attended mall shows and the overall ‘royal treatment’ that was accorded to him in the few days that he spent in the metropolis. The deeply entrenched popularity of basketball in the Philippines impressed him so much, he left a piece of advice to his fellow NBA players: “If you’re having a bad day or having a bad career, go to Manila. They’ll bring your spirits up, trust me. I felt like I just won an NBA championship, to be for real.”¹

The favorable reception that Arenas received in Manila and the overall economic and cultural condition that made his global promotional tour possible reflect the recent increase of the popularity of basketball, and of the NBA in particular, in many countries around the world. Generally, this development did not come as a surprise to some sport scholars who generally saw the unique qualities of basketball that is largely in tune with

¹ Gilbert Arenas, ‘Everybody Should Visit Manila,’ *Agent Zero: The Blog File*, July 14, 2008. Retrieved July 15, 2008 (<http://my.nba.com/thread.jspa?threadID=5700017915>).

the intricacies of post-modern society.² Michael Mandelbaum, in his perceptive work on “the meanings of sport” in contemporary United States, pointed out how “the character of the game was in tune with the salient features of the post-industrial world”.³ Among the most popular international sports, it is argued that basketball was in a position to benefit from technological and creative advances made in the television industry in the 1980s because of its speedy and continuous “telegenic quality” that fits the highly mobile and fast-paced lifestyle of the 21st century.⁴

The NBA, in particular, has been implementing an aggressive overseas expansion plan that follows the path taken by major American entertainment conglomerates such as Disney and Time-Warner since the late 1980s. The professional basketball league tried to achieve this goal “by developing a global market of its products, thus becoming a transnational corporate” unit.⁵ Hence, just like the corporate logos of the various merchandise that they represent, NBA players – from Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, to LeBron James, and even borderline stars like Gilbert Arenas – are easily recognizable as contemporary global icons. Generally, the impact of its expansion, the degree of local reception, and the overall entrenchment of basketball vary across geographical and

² See, for instance, Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1999).

³ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 278.

⁴ Judy Polumbaum, *Evangelism to Entertainment*. Also see Brook Larmer, “The Center of the World,” *Foreign Policy* (Sept./Oct. 2005). Retrieved November 7, 2005.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/users/login.php?story_id=3177&URL=http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3177.

⁵ David L. Andrews, “The (Trans)National Basketball Association: American Commodity-Sign Culture and Global-Local Conjuncturalism,” in Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner (eds.), *Articulating The Global and The Local: Globalization and Cultural Studies*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997): 79.

cultural locations. In addition, there are still regions such as South Asia where the promotion of basketball has not made much progress. Even in Europe, South America, Africa, and the Middle East where it has recently shown a remarkable advancement, basketball remained second to football in terms of participation and following.

Nonetheless, the growing interest for the sport in many countries, as Arenas' tour would testify, creates much media buzz and attracts a great deal of attention from local basketball fans. This attention reflects the kind of frenzy that the countless other American products receive after they have suddenly flooded many local markets since the advent of globalization. However, questions remain whether basketball can sustain its unprecedented rise, especially in areas that have long-entrenched modern sporting traditions. On the surface, the globalization of basketball currently appears more like a fleeting fad than a lasting cultural phenomenon in most parts of the world.

The Philippines, apparently, is not among these places – as Arenas' experience in Manila would attest. Nonetheless, basketball in the archipelagic republic has limited exposure outside the country since it has largely remained domestically-oriented and did not have a successful campaign in top international competitions since the 1950s (see Chapter 5). These are the reasons why the visiting NBA player was completely amazed with the popularity of the sport in the country. Although he might still wonder at how Spanish fans are very knowledgeable about basketball or that many Chinese are actually taller than him (he stands 6'4"), they did not come as a complete surprise to him. Obviously, Arenas should be quite familiar with the status of the sport in these countries since both

can boasts of outstanding international records. Besides, Pau Gasol, who is a multi-awarded cager from Spain or Yao Ming, the Chinese behemoth, are popular NBA superstars, just like him.⁶ Their entry into the US was largely made possible by the advent of globalization, which ushered an important shift in the late 1980s when the NBA started to look overseas for basketball talents. This trend intensified after the start of the new millennium, making foreign players an integral part of the premier American basketball league.

Unlike China and Spain, however, the Philippines has failed to qualify for any major international competitions since 1978 and no Filipino has ever played in the NBA. Yet, why does basketball attract much more following in the latter than in the former two countries, as Arenas' suggested in his blog? Clearly, the influence of football and other "traditional" sport practices such as bullfighting or martial arts are putting a challenge to the advance of basketball in these countries. However, apart from this obvious reason there are still other trails that are worth exploring in understanding the dynamics of basketball diffusion, especially in the context of globalization. One of the interesting area to investigate is the path of a country's history in the twentieth century, especially the history of its relationship with the United States, the global superpower where basketball also happens to originate.

⁶ Pau Gasol was the 3rd pick in the 2001 NBA Draft and eventually wound up with the Rookie of the Year honors, while Yao was the top overall selection in the rookie pool the following season. Overall, five Chinese and seven Spanish are currently in the NBA roster or had played in the league at one time.

This chapter examines the impact of globalization on national sports through the refractive lens of postcolonialism. In recent years, there has been a great deal of debate regarding whether globalization is merely the process of Americanization due the US' enormous political, economic, and cultural influence around the world, or if it is more of a universal exchange of knowledge and resources among various independent nations. The latter seems to have attracted more supporters, particularly in the field of sport studies.⁷ This essay tries to contribute to this discussion by providing a more concrete distinction of the two concepts through the analysis of some contemporary issues on basketball in the Philippines. Basically, it presents globalization as a fairly new social phenomenon and paradigmatic catchphrase, which became prominent in the 1990s. On the other hand, Americanization is distinguished with its longer history, particularly tied to the United States' colonial and imperial legacies.

The main objective of the inquiry, however, is not to highlight their differences but to trace their link and emphasize the continuity between the two concepts in order to produce a more historically rooted representation of the contemporary significance of basketball in the Philippines. It veers away from normative analysis to evaluate whether the impact of globalization on sport in the Philippines has been positive or negative. Instead, it examines the processes wherein the local sporting culture responds to the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization.

⁷ Toby Miller, et.al., *Globalization and Sport*.

By looking into the case of the PBA (Philippine Basketball Association), it argues that the contemporary global order that is reshaping the contours of the country's hegemonic sporting culture is merely another upsurge in the waves of Americanization that has been inundating the archipelagic nation since the turn of the 20th century. Hence, if the popularity of basketball in China and Spain is a recent fad that was brought about by the current global system,⁸ the deep entrenchment of the sport in the everyday life of most Filipinos is a product of a long-standing American cultural influence.

POWER MOVES: BASKETBALL, GLOBALIZATION, POSTCOLONIALISM

Modern sport has been influenced by global trends long before the concept of “globalization” ever emerged. Before it became a buzzword towards the end of the last century, “the organizational structure for the globalization of sport has been in existence for some time”.⁹ The standardization of rules, migration of players, coaches, and other personnel, and the establishment of major events like the Olympics and other similar competitions have led to the global diffusion of many sports. In fact, sport is not only one of the few fields where globalization initially became prominent; it is also argued that because of the existence of fewer cultural and political obstacles to the development of sport on a global scale, it became one of the most advanced cases of globalization.¹⁰

⁸ For a discussion on the impact of globalization on Chinese basketball, see Andrew Morris, *I Believe You Can Fly*. For a piece on Yao Ming and Globalization, check Brook Larmer, *The Center of the World*.

⁹ Alan Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization: European and North American Perspective*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001): 11.

¹⁰ Lincoln Allison (ed.), *The Global Politics of Sport*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

The global diffusion of sport can initially be traced to colonialism. Soldiers, missionaries and other colonial workers often played their favorite sports as one of their pastimes in countering the drudgery of life in the colony. For instance, the British brought cricket, rugby, and soccer to Australia, India and the other Crown Colonies, while the Americans introduced baseball, volleyball, and basketball to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines¹¹. However, the popularity of modern sports in many developing countries is not merely viewed as a latent, and therefore incidental, effect of Western colonialism. Rather, modern sports are largely viewed as colonial tools that were used to facilitate the subjugation of colonies and maintain the hegemony of colonial power.¹²

In most developing countries, the introduction of modern sports came as one of the less recognized but essential aspects of their colonial history. Sports helped to introduce new standards of individual behavior and social relations that could allow the colonizers to maintain their control over their colonies.¹³ Consequently, these sport practices were adapted and appropriated by the indigenous populations, eventually evolving to become an important component of their cultural tradition and everyday lives. This absorption and the resulting entrenchment of Western sports practices into the local cultural milieu enabled them to remain in many postcolonial states even years after their independence.

¹¹ The US assumed sovereignty over these territories after defeating Spain, in the Spanish-American War in 1898.

¹² See Brian Stoddart, *Sport, Culture and History*, (London: Routledge, 2008).

¹³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*. Also see Brian Stoddart, *Sport, Culture and History*.

Ironically, some Western sports that became deeply entrenched into the cultural consciousness and everyday lives of the local population have ultimately evolved into venues of local resistance. They were employed as ‘less violent’ but symbolically significant means of countering the influence of colonialism and imperialism. Sport victories over a hegemonic power were seen as moments of cultural emancipation. For instance, the Japanese celebrated their high school team’s victory against a team of American soldiers and expatriates stationed at Yokohama in 1896;¹⁴ or the Indian had their moment of jubilation in 1911 when a group of ‘barefooted players’ defeated a team of British soldiers in a game of football.¹⁵ Hence, what started as a colonial tool of political control could ironically evolved into a symbolic form of local resistance and a medium for the expression of national identity.

Nonetheless, the early association of modern sports with colonialism in many developing countries has also been commonly viewed as uneasy reminder of the colonial its past. As a result, the colonial sports that were eventually integrated within the postcolonial state’s cultural traditions are on occasions seen as a channel that perpetuates the presence of neocolonial relations.¹⁶ Hence the popularity of modern sports in former colonies is seen as a continuation of Western domination over the peripheral societies. The globalization of sport, in particular, which has been largely perceived as responsible for the rising

¹⁴ Donald Roden, *Baseball and the Quest for National Dignity in Japan*.

¹⁵ Tony Mason, “Football on the Maidan: Cultural Imperialism in Calcutta,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1990): 85-96. Also see Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires*.

¹⁶ James Mills, *Subaltern Sports*. Also see John Bale and Mike Cronin, *Sport and Postcolonialism*.

number of foreign players and the increasing influence of multi-national sports companies in national sport leagues, became a target of this type of criticism.

THE GLOBAL SPORT AND THE LOCAL LEAGUE

The period around the end of the 20th century saw the rapid advancement of the ‘globalization of sport’ as particularly characterized by “the movement of performers, coaches, administrators, and sport scientists within and between continents and hemispheres”.¹⁷ Aside from the migration of athletes and other personnel, the period also saw an increasing flow of resources and information that shaped the development of sport in many countries. For many developing nations, the globalization of sport resulted in the improvement of sport programs due to greater access to foreign players and coaches who have more advanced training and exposure to international competitions. Apart from this benefit, the availability of more commercial sponsors has also led to the greater accessibility of modern equipment and facilities, and more opportunity to gain experience due to the increased frequency of competitions with top-caliber teams.

However, despite some of the highlighted positive impacts of globalization on the development of basketball in the Philippines, its effect on the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) – country’s premier hoops league – was proven to be quite detrimental. Since the turn of the new millennium, its average gate attendance every year has become unpredictable.¹⁸ Apart from the unstable game patronage, lackluster TV

¹⁷ Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); 89.

¹⁸ Joel Orellana, Basketball Continues to Lose its Popularity, *The Manila Times*, Aug. 19, 2006. Retrieved August 19, 2006 (<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?>

ratings and a series of high-profile controversies have also compromised the continued existence of the association.

Not only that, the premier basketball league in the country, where the best actors of basketball drama perform, is increasingly losing its appeal to the Filipinos. Among the many notable problems hounding the influence and the overall viability of PBA are the issues surrounding the influx of players with mixed Filipino-foreign ethnic backgrounds, the increased popularity of the NBA among Filipino basketball followers, the rise of local basketball leagues, and the inability of the PBA-manned national team to regain its prominence in the Asian basketball scene. These issues that are all linked to the larger social upheaval that came with the intensification of globalization in the 21st century, have altogether contributed to the general decline of the PBA in the past years.

From Fil-Ams to Fil-Shams

Players with mixed Filipino-foreign ethnic backgrounds have been an important part of the local basketball scene since the early 20th century. The *mestizos* (Spanish-Filipino), Fil-Ams (Filipino-Americans) and those with other ethnic backgrounds such as (Fil-Australians, Fil-Germans, etc.) are regular fixtures in the history of basketball in the Philippines. In fact, some of the most notable Filipino basketball players such as Luis Salvador, Charles Borck, Carlos Loyzaga, Kurt Bachman, and Robert Jaworski, all came from this category. It is widely deemed that these athletes excelled because, apart from

their basketball skills, their foreign (racial) backgrounds apparently gave them the height advantage over the average Filipino.

The number of Filipino-foreign players, particularly the Filipino-Americans (Fil-Ams) significantly increased since the late 1990s because of an improved scouting network that enables PBA teams to scour American and other overseas schools for potential players. Their entry into the local league was initially welcomed with great enthusiasm because they were able to infuse new energy and, thereby, became instant attractions that further promoted the fan appeal of the PBA with their height, athleticism, and NBA-style of play. As a result, there has been a huge influx of this type of players and the Fil-Am craze even spilled over to the amateur ranks where they also became a regular fixture in college and university teams. This trend follows a global propensity for greater mobility of human resources, particularly in professional sports where athletes freely cross national boundaries to showcase their talents abroad. None is most evident than in the NBA where such names as Mutumbo, Nowitski, Ilgauskas, Stojakovic, Turkoglu, Ginobili, and Yao, among many others – are increasingly making the American league an “alien nation”.¹⁹

Unlike the NBA, the Philippine league, however, insists on its requirement for foreign players to have Filipino roots in either parentage. Nonetheless, the overall structure and identity of the PBA have been substantially altered and many local fans lament at the sight of how their beloved league had been transformed into something that is noticeably foreign. Currently, the majority of the PBA teams are made of players whose part ethnic

¹⁹ John Walters, “NBA Playoffs Becoming a Foreign Affair,” *NBC Sports.com*, Retrieved April 19, 2008, (<http://nbcsports.msnbc.com/id/24202212/site/21683474/page/2/>).

origins ranged from the usual American, Australian, and European to the few Tongan, Indian, Bahraini, and Kuwaiti.

When the new millennium set in, the Fil-Am craze soon took a huge setback when a number of cagers were found out to have falsified documents to support their Filipino lineage. This led to several lawsuits and even a Senate inquiry that hung a dark shadow over the clean and upright image that the PBA has been trying to project. “They were the shams that shamed the Philippine Basketball Association,” wrote one journalist, “a stigma on the league that was marking its 30th season and a period of transition as the oldest play-for-pay loop in Asia.”²⁰ After a highly publicized investigation, six were suspended and eventually deported from the country. In the list of players ordered for deportation, four were considered among the league’s major stars.²¹

Then came the more controversial issue of illegal drug use. Around the same time when the issue regarding the veracity of the Filipino citizenship of some Filipino-foreign players was getting a lot of media attention, the PBA received another blow when a number of its players tested positive to the use of illegal substance during a random check-up. After an inquiry five players were meted with suspensions. Of the five, three were Filipino-foreign players who were among the league’s top superstars.²² As a result

²⁰ Bong Pedralvez, ‘Fil-Shams’ Casts Shadow Over Pinoy Sports Heroes, *The Manila Times*, Dec. 28, 2003. Retrieved September 20, 2005 (<http://www.manilatimes.net/others/yearend/2003/dec/28/20031919spe1.html>).

²¹ Bong Pedralvez, *Fil-Shams’ Casts Shadow Over Pinoy Sports Heroes*.

²² Agnes R. Cruz, “Torion Gets Green Light To Play Again in the PBA,” *Philippines Today: Online Edition*, Aug. 3, 2003. Retrieved April 6, 2007 (http://www.philippinestoday.net/2003/August/sports3_803.htm).

of these scandals, the once-admired “Fil-Ams” became the frowned upon “Fil-Shams”; the players who were supposed to bring the PBA to greater new heights were the ones sowing the seeds of its downfall.

To make matters worse, all these scandals came after some local players and sport journalists have criticized the Filipino-foreign players for getting higher salaries and enjoying more perks that should have gone to local-born players. This resulted in debates whether the continued entry of Filipino-foreign players should be maintained after they marginalized homegrown talents. Moreover, many of the local basketball fans could not relate to most of these new players because of differences in physical features and cultural background. Although, some Filipino-foreign players became popular among the fans, many people still believe that they were “not really Filipinos”, and teams should instead concentrate on developing local players than on recruiting “half-bred” or “hybrid” Filipinos from abroad. One former league official suggested that for the league to recover from the current slump it should change its emphasis on Filipino-foreign players. He even pointed out the “glory days” of the PBA in the 1970s and 1980s when homegrown players take centerstage. He explained:

There’s a lot of difference when you talk about foreigners with Filipino roots [Fil-Ams, etc.] and the heroes who were raised here and learned the game in sandlots or in local schools.

Fans have an easier time relating with players whom they have seen in television from the time they started their careers.

These homegrown players have a built-in fan base and they add weight to a marketing strategy. Fellow alumni and provincemates of these players embrace

them as their own.²³

Clearly, the controversy surrounding the status of Filipino-foreign players in recent years transcends the issue of citizenship. First, it is a question of national loyalty. What motivated these individuals to come to the Philippines? Often, these hybrid cagers were primarily attracted by the financial and other benefits that come with playing professional sports. How interested are they in coming to the country? The ultimate goal for these athletes when they were still in the collegiate tournaments was to play in the NBA or in any other major leagues abroad, the PBA became a convenient backup plan once their aspiration to play in the US or Europe failed to get much ground. Hence, it is quite difficult to gauge the loyalty of these people if their main motivation is just money, especially if coming to the country was not their first choice, anyway. In fact, most of these Filipino-foreign players return to their previous countries of residence after their retirement from the PBA.

This matter becomes even more controversial when these athletes are chosen to wear the national colors and represent the country in international competitions. Do these Filipino-foreign players have the same sense of national sentiment that homegrown players normally have? Are they ready to “die” for their country as the elated “heroes” for the millions of Filipino basketball fans? Indeed, athleticism is necessary and their excellent basketball skill is even essential but in top-level competitions where athleticism and

²³ Tommy Manotoc, “PBA Marketing, Repackaging Go Hand-in-Hand,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Mar. 20, 2009. Retrieved March 21, 2009 (<http://sports.inquirer.net/inquirersports/inquirersports/view/20090320-195167/PBA-marketing-repackaging-go-hand-in-hand>).

talent abound, a game is often decided by the amount of passion and dedication that players give to their teams. For the supporters of the displaced homegrown players, the recruitment of Filipino-foreign players is even equated to hiring mercenaries. Thus, a victory with these “paid” heroes are often seen as something hollow, falling empty on its significance as a source of inspiration and as a symbol of emancipation for the subaltern nation.

Apart from the question of national loyalty, the issues surrounding the influx of Filipino-foreign players in the PBA is mainly about culture. For instance, many local fans are appalled by what they generally find as too flashy and overbearing on-court demeanor of the league’s new breed of stars. Apart from their character, the Filipino-foreign players are mostly unfamiliar of the many other cultural nuances that serve as a hindrance in their effort to reach out to Filipino basketball followers. In short, as the PBA becomes more globalized, it is also evolving into a foreign dominated league, a decisive transformation that leaves many of its avid supporters alienated.

The External Threat: The Increasing Popularity of the NBA

Having saturated the domestic supply of good athletes and reliable market, while increasing salaries of local players, the NBA went overseas during the 1990s in search of cheaper talent and likely customers to maintain its business.²⁴ Although no Filipino player has successfully ventured into the NBA yet, the American league, nonetheless, recognizes the enormous basketball following in the country that they could exploit as a

²⁴ Toby Miller, et. al., *Globalization and Sport*.

stable market for their products. To promote the NBA in the Philippines, more of their players, like Gilbert Arenas whose visit last year was mentioned earlier in the opening section of the chapter, are coming over than before.

In addition, various promotional activities such as basketball teaching clinics and product launchings are also organized. For instance, the NBA Madness, an interactive multi-program event that is aimed to bring the fun and excitement of the league to local fans, has already been held in the country twice in less than five years. The most recent was organized in Metro Manila from July 6-8, 2007. The attraction featured the Dallas Mavericks club that was represented by All-Star player Jerry Stackhouse, the team's corps of cheerleaders, and their official mascot. These personalities and the various programs during the three-day event enabled the NBA fans in the country to get a close look of the American league.

Generally, the increased local exposure of the NBA resulted in a notable upsurge of local television ratings and the Philippines became one of the biggest followers of the American basketball league in Asia. Since the turn of the new millennium, two live games are shown every week in national television channels when before this period, there was only one weekly delayed telecast of NBA matches. But aside from the programs in local television, the availability of cable television enabled many Filipinos to watch almost all the daily games of the NBA. Aside from the sports channels like ESPN and StarSports, viewers can also check the NBA TV channel where live games and other basketball programs are shown. As a result, the greater accessibility of the NBA and the

strengthening of its legion of local fans, have greatly affected the popularity of the Philippines' own professional league. From a big primetime attraction, the PBA games shown on television are now just a second-class basketball act, that less and less people are interested in watching.

Finally, the rising popularity of the NBA in the Philippine did not merely hinged on its greater accessibility or with its aggressive global promotion. Instead, the American basketball league's growing influence relied largely on its "cultural appeal" as a global brand. In comparison, Mark Falcous and Joseph Maguire looked into the impact of the expansion of the major American basketball league (seen as a globalizing process) in shaping local basketball subcultures. Their study noted how "issues of relevancy and affiliations to 'community' (sporting and otherwise) are pivotal in the local reception, rejection, accommodation, and/or consumption of the imagery and paraphernalia of the TNCs, such as the NBA."²⁵ As the previous chapter's discussion on PBA fandom have clearly established, Falcous and Maguire's findings resonate in the various issues and processes that rule the Philippine basketball scene. Particularly, the role of "communities" (both real and imagined) in shaping the relationship between global basketball culture and everyday lives of ordinary basketball fans seems to show that whether in Manchester or in Manila, ballers and their followers exist in one "hoops world".

²⁵ Mark Falcous and Joseph Maguire, "Making It Local? National Basketball Expansion and English Basketball Subcultures," in Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews, and C.L. Cole (eds.), *Sport and Corporate Nationalisms*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 30.

The Internal Threat: The Rise of Local Amateur Leagues

Apart from the rise of the NBA, the growth of basketball at the collegiate level has also taken a large part of the basketball attention away from the PBA. These two related trends reflect Kinichi Omae's insightful analysis of the impact of globalization on the nation-state. He argues that the current global upheaval resulted in the "hollowing out" of the nation as local and external forces continue to erode its long-held influence.²⁶ In the context of Philippine basketball, the increasing popularity both of the NBA (external) and the local amateur leagues (internal) represent this process of "hollowing out" that left the PBA, a national entity (in terms of its scope of cultural influence) struggling for its survival.

Particularly, the rise of the collegiate leagues into a major spectator and television attraction has been most notable among the amateur ranks. Before the new millennium, most collegiate basketball games in the Philippines were just held in stuffy university gymnasiums with limited audience and little media coverage. However, the recent years saw the commercialization of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) and the UAAP (University Athletic Association of the Philippines) basketball games. With this development, both interscholastic leagues have successfully expanded the fan base of the collegiate tournaments beyond their campuses. While some PBA games could hardly fill half of the Araneta Coliseum (one of the PBA game venues), entrance tickets could run out in a couple of days for a game between rival universities. Particularly, the match up between the teams of the Ateneo de Manila University and the De La Salle University

²⁶ Kinichi Omae, *The End of the Nation-State: The Rise of Regional Economies*, (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

has evolved into a highly-popular rivalry that attracts an enormous amount of fan following and media attention. Television ratings of live collegiate basketball have also steadily increased in the recent years. But unlike in the PBA where basketball most followers could hardly relate to the teams that are named after their sponsors, students and alumni often await the next schedule when games featuring their alma mater are shown on TV.

Apart from holding games in big venues and getting national television coverage, the commercialization of the amateur collegiate leagues also includes the entry of corporate sponsorship, the marketing of varsity apparel, and the rise of some college athletes as entertainment celebrities (just like PBA stars). In addition, many university teams now hire high-profile coaches who have professional experience instead of just making do with their most available physical education instructors. Furthermore, schools no longer just enlist those students who excel in intramural tournaments. Rather, most of them have aggressive recruitment programs that scour the whole country and even secondary institutions abroad for the best basketball prospects. This is why the most collegiate teams are now manned with foreign players who come from the United States as well as those from faraway countries such as Nigeria and Serbia.

The Regional Challenge: The Failure to Reclaim the Superiority in Asian Basketball

“I could be wrong,” a sports journalist wrote with caution, “but statistics showed that PBA attendance suffered after each debacle in the Asian Games.” He added:

Since 1990 have we beaten China in basketball? In the last Asian Games, the national team, composed of PBA players, lost to China, Korea and Kazakhstan in the medal race.

And in this year's ABC (FIBA-Asia) tournament, the Philippines finished a dismal 15th, second to last. It was the country's worst ever in the 43-year-history of the Olympic qualifier.

In my opinion, those embarrassing setbacks are some of the major reasons why the Filipino fans have been slowly shying away from most of the PBA games despite all the media hype and hoopla. The fans want winners, not certified losers.²⁷

After dominating the Asian basketball scene in the first three quarters of the 20th century, there is a strong pressure from the Filipino fans for the national team to regain its superiority of the sport in the region. Since the PBA took the responsibility of representing the country in major international competitions in the 1990s, the successive reincarnation of the national team has come close to winning the Asian Games basketball championship, the regions most prestigious basketball crown. They came second in 1990, fourth in 1994, third in 1998, again placed fourth in 2002, before the Philippines was meted with suspension by FIBA in 2006 and, therefore, was able to participate in the quadrennial event that year (see Table 7.1).

For most local basketball fans, however, those promising performances are not a cause for optimism. Rather, they merely reflect the commonly perceived reality that basketball is not really for the Filipinos. Many people question the practicality of spending huge amount of money on a mediocre team that has almost no chance of winning the Asian championship. Instead, they suggest the country should just concentrate in other sports such as boxing, bowling, billiards and chess where height is not a premium and expectedly, national players would have more chances of winning.

²⁷ Manolo Inigo, "PBA Losing its Appeal," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, (Nov. 10, 2003): A31.

Table 6. Basketball Results in the Asian Games

Year	Location	Final Standing	Champion	Runner-Up
(1 st) 1951	New Delhi	First	Philippines	Japan
(2 nd) 1954	Manila	First	Philippines	Taiwan
(3 rd) 1958	Tokyo	First	Philippines	Taiwan
(4 th) 1962	Jakarta	First	Philippines	Japan
(5 th) 1966	Bangkok	Sixth	Israel	Thailand
(6 th) 1970	Bangkok	Fifth	South Korea	Israel
(7 th) 1974	Teheran	Fourth	Israel	South Korea
(8 th) 1978	Bangkok	Fifth	China	South Korea
(9 th) 1982	New Delhi	Fourth	South Korea	China
(10 th) 1986	Seoul	Third	China	Korea
(11 th) 1990	Beijing	Second	China	Philippines
(12 th) 1994	Hiroshima	Fourth	China	Korea
(13 th) 1998	Bangkok	Third	China	South Korea
(14 th) 2002	Busan	Fourth	South Korea	China
(15 th) 2006	Doha	Suspended	China	Qatar

Sources: Dayrit, 2003; Research Data.

Despite its recent debacle, the Philippines remains as one of the top teams in Asia. In sub-regional tournaments, the amateur squads that represent the country in the SEA (Southeast Asian) Games have been dominating the basketball competitions in the biennial event for years. However, its superiority in Southeast Asian basketball almost unremarkable since the Philippines is the only nation in the region where basketball is a popular pastime. Ultimately, the goal of the PBA is to put together a team that will qualify for the major international tournaments, which is the World Championships and the Olympics. But because of FIBA's qualifying system that allows only one Asian team to participate in the two most prestigious events in basketball, it requires for the Filipinos to excel first in Asia. This objective means more than just beating China since many of the national basketball teams in the region have improved tremendously in recent years. In fact, even the Chinese teams that boast of four current and future NBA players, (one of

them, Yao Ming, who is a perennial NBA All-Star) was beaten by a more determined South Korean team in the 2002 Asian Games in Busan, South Korea.

PLAYING WITH GLOBALIZATION

“We are experiencing globalization... and I think everyone is experiencing hard times. We must be honest enough to say that we are experiencing hard times.”²⁸ It is interesting to note how Emilio Bernardino, Jr., the PBA Commissioner from 1993-2002, has a very negative outlook of globalization, seeing it entirely as a major economic crisis rather than an overarching process of social transformation. However, given the initial impact of the recent global upheaval on the Philippines’ premier basketball league, Bernardino’s viewpoint is explicable. Hence, in order to cope with the injurious impact of globalization, the league has implemented a number of programs to make its operation sustainable, and more importantly, to regain its strong appeal among the Filipino basketball fans.

Among these strategies is the revision of the league format that aims to sustain fan’s interest and improves the quality of competition in a tight eight-month schedule. This shifted the tournament set-up of the league to a singular championship similar to the NBA to replace the three-conference system that has been in use since 1986. The staging of a tournament for a single national championship will address the problem of basketball saturation. This revision also enhances the prestige of a singular championship, provides

²⁸ Dave L. Llorito, “Fil-Pretenders Put Up Defense Against Deportation,” *The Manila Times, Special Report*, Nov. 10, 2003. Retrieved April 6, 2009 (<http://www.manilatimes.net/others/special/2003/nov/10/20031110spe1.html>).

the momentum for players and teams to build up for the title playoffs without slackening and assures a more relevant approach to each game leading towards the ultimate goal of winning the PBA-or-national-title. The switch to a fiscal calendar avoided scheduling games during the rainy season and made room for participation in international competitions such as the World Championships, the Olympics, the Asian Games and zonal qualifying tournaments.

Another plan was “to bring the PBA closer to the people” by scheduling more games in strategic cities around the country. With this strategy, the objective of the league was to strengthen its fan base in the provinces, which for a long time has been marginalized by its concentration in Metro Manila. Aside from scheduling regular season games in the provinces, the PBA has also been holding its annual mid-season highlight, the All-Star Game, outside the Philippine capital in the past six years. The PBA All-Star Game has also moved beyond mere basketball spectacle featuring the season’s best players. They have started to conduct civic-oriented activities such as visiting schools and street children foundations, and other community-based outreach programs in the cities where All-Star Games are held.

Moreover, the country’s premier basketball league also tries to expand by starting to hold official games overseas. On March 8, 2005, the first PBA match outside of the Philippines was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, pitting the Shell Turbo Chargers and the Talk n’ Text Phone Pals. Since then, professional Filipino basketball has been showcased in Hongkong, Guam, Dubai, and Singapore. In addition, the PBA Legends Tour, a series of

exhibition games featuring former league superstars, visited several cities in Australia in 2005 as well as in the United States in 2008. Primarily, these international games were aimed to attract the large number of Filipino expatriate communities in these foreign cities, although, the league is hoping it can also get the attention of the local basketball fans.

Outside the PBA, the globalization of sports has also given an opportunity for Filipino basketball talents to showcase their skills abroad. For instance, the Indonesian Basketball League (IBL) features a number of Filipino players. This is a welcome development particularly because the list of cagers includes former professional ballers and amateur standouts who could not get into the PBA. Aside from the players, Filipino coaches Geraldo Ramos and David Zamar are mentoring two of the IBL teams. Ramos led Aspac Jakarta into a Grand Slam championship in 2004 and was eventually hired as to handle the Indonesian national basketball team. Recently, Zamar crossed the border to man the bench of the Melaka Chinwoo club in the Malaysia National Basketball League (MNBL). One of his top players is also Filipino, Jay Gabonada. Last year, they lost the MNBL championship to Klang WCT Land Berhad, a team coached by Daniel Advincula who also hails from the Philippines. Apart from Indonesia and Malaysia, Filipino basketball players also currently display their wares in professional leagues in Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Germany, Switzerland, and the Cayman Islands. Finally, the establishment of the ASEAN Basketball League in 2009 has further expanded the influence of Philippine basketball as well as the opportunities for Filipino professional basketball players. Expectedly, the Philippine Patriots bested five other teams from various Southeast Asian

nations, all of which have one to three Filipinos in their rosters of players. The Brunei team was even mentored by Geraldo Ramos, a veteran coach in several Philippine amateur basketball leagues.

Furthermore, the initiatives that the PBA had started to implement at the turn of the new millennium had apparently made an immediate impact. By April 2004, it was reported that the PBA attendance went up to over 132 million in Metro Manila or a 12.1 percent increase from the previous year. Compared to figures two years before, the increase in attendance of paying ticket-holders was a significant 29.56 percent. This development pushed its gross revenue to over P16 Million for an increase of 7.1 percent. This number reflected a dramatic 80.3 percent improvement in two years. In addition, the provincial results were even more impressive. In the first six out-of-town games, the average attendance was 5,000 or a 44.94 percent increase from the previous year. Ticket sales amounted to P6.4 Million or a staggering 116.17 percent increase.²⁹ The figures three years later were even more promising. From a balance of about P60 million in 2006, the league reported a 47 percent growth the following year that amounted to a P86.9 million net income. On the whole, ticket sales went up by 17 percent and total revenue by ten percent.³⁰

Nonetheless, Ricky Vargas, the PBA Chairman warned that “figures don’t mean a thing if the PBA isn’t geared for the future”. He added, “[a] vision propelled by a passion for

²⁹ Joaquin Henson, “PBA Back on Track,” *The Philippine Star*, April 28, 2004. Retrieved April 10, 2009 (<http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/sp/sp021078.htm>).

³⁰ Joaquin Henson, “Time to Rethink PBA Constitution,” *The Philippine Star*, November 4, 2007. Retrieved April 10, 2009 (<http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/sp/sp021857.htm>).

the game is what will take Asia's first play-for-pay league to the next level."³¹ Despite the favorable performance of the PBA in 2004 and 2007, it also shows the fluctuations that occurred during the interval years. This apparent instability of the PBA demonstrates the necessity of more long-term measures to ensure its relevance and viability. A low attendance record, for instance, can be remedied by a well-planned marketing strategy such as the expansion of its market base in the provinces and even overseas, which the league already successfully applied. The sustainability of these initiatives, however, hinges on its capability to strengthen its cultural anchor that has been increasingly weakened by the corrosive impact of globalization.

A DIFFERENT BALLGAME:

AMERICANIZATION, POSTCOLONIALISM, GLOBALIZATION

The evolution of Philippine basketball, and of the PBA in particular, have shown that globalization is not an entirely new phenomenon. Without necessarily delving far beyond the surface, there are a number of evidences that shows how country's premier basketball league has always been "global" since its inception in 1975. First, despite its origin in a local amateur league, the establishment of the PBA involved a significant amount of knowledge importation since its professional rules and organizational set-up was largely patterned after the NBA (see Chapter Five). This consequent cultural conjunction allowed for the emergence of innovative rationalities, a process that reflects the rise of new spaces and knowledge in contemporary global-local nexus. Thus, the founding of the PBA

³¹ Joaquin Henson, *Time to Rethink PBA Constitution*.

resulted in a league and a widespread sporting culture that is very American yet distinctly Filipino.

Second, the prominence of multi-national companies (MNCs), which are largely deemed as the main agents of the current economic and cultural globalization, has also been playing an important role in the PBA. In fact, many PBA teams were under the ownership of MNCs since the league started in 1975. For instance, the first PBA champion was the Toyota Team, which, as its name entails is owned by the popular Japanese car manufacturing company. Other MNC-owned franchises include the Shell Turbochargers, Fed-Ex Express, Coca-Cola Tigers, and the Burger King Whoppers. Lastly, the free movement of human resources that characterizes one of the most notable consequences of globalization has been part of the professional sport scene for some time.³² In the PBA, for instance, foreigners, especially Americans, were actively involved in the league as players and coaches ever since the league started. Foreign players, who are called “imports”, are being hired to reinforce the PBA teams right when the league was born.

A closer examination of these processes, however, reveals the crucial link of the global features of the PBA to the larger history of the American influence in the Philippines. As discussed earlier in Chapter Five, the influence of NBA, the participation of teams sponsored by US-based multi-national companies, and the active participation of

³² Alan Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization*.

American players and coaches could be a mere continuation of the long-standing influence of the United States over its former colony.

From 1898 when the budding superpower assumed sovereignty over the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, to the three decades of direct colonial rule after crushing Asia's first republic in the Philippine-American War, the United States has been casting a strong influence over the archipelagic nation. During this period, various bureaucratic and public welfare institutions such as hospitals and schools were established providing important channels that helped to strengthen US political power as well as bolster its cultural influence. In fact, it was through one of these colonial initiatives, the public school system, that basketball was introduced to the people and when it initially attracted a widespread following (see Chapter One).

The creation of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1934 allowed the United States to legitimize the image of a "benevolent tutor" that it has been trying to project since the early period of its occupation of the islands. On the other end, this political set-up allowed the Philippines to represent itself in international sports competitions and the notable performance of its basketball team in the 1936 Olympics became a source of inspiration for the emerging nation (see Chapter Two). Ten years later, the "liberation" of the country from the Japanese Imperial Forces and the granting of full independence to the Philippines by the Americans after the Second World War further endeared the US to many Filipinos.

In the same way, the considerable amount of progress that the country has attained after its rise from the devastating impact of the Second World War, has also made the former colonial power proud of its “achievements” in setting up the foundation of the modern Philippines. Thus when its national basketball teams made credible showings in the Olympic and World Championship tournaments in the 1950s, the United States was quick to share in the victories, pointing out how their previous efforts to develop sports in their former colony had finally bore fruits. The occasions, in local context, cemented the position of basketball as a national sport, supplanting the prominence of baseball, America’s favorite pastime, in terms of popular following and cultural influence (see Chapter Three). This turn of event marked the symbolic emergence of the Philippines out of the shadows of its former colonial master, although ironically, it was only moving to another form of American sport.

The relatively positive relationship between the two nations resulted in the greater openness of the newly independent country to the political, economic and cultural influences of the United States. Hence, when the latter led the capitalist world into the Cold War, the Philippines was one of its most trusted allies, where two of the superpower’s largest overseas military bases were located. During this critical period, US tried to strengthen its influence in Asia by getting itself and its ideological viewpoints entrenched in the everyday lives of many people in the region. This effort resulted in the proliferation of American cultural products in the form of Hollywood films, rock n’ roll, jazz and country music genres, as well as major league sports. The various events that occurred during this period have resulted in the “hollywoodization of hoops” that

transformed the overall significance of basketball in the Philippines from a national symbol to a prominent icon of popular culture (see Chapter Four).

Clearly, the recent advent of globalization and its impact on the structure and the social significance of basketball are closely linked to abovementioned series of crucial events that shaped the development of the sport in the Philippines. At least, in the context of Philippine basketball, globalization is not an entirely new cultural phenomenon but comes mainly as a recent surge of Americanization that has been continuously inundating the archipelago since the turn of the 20th century. Thus, a postcolonial analysis of how the historical process of colonization, nationalism, and neocolonialism are related to existing conception of identity politics, economic relations, and cultural dynamics reveals a more rooted and exhaustive grasp of globalization and its many consequences.

Finally, understanding the impact of globalization on Philippine basketball also invites for the examination of local agents. Particularly, the recent issues affecting the PBA not only came as a product of supra-societal processes but also emerged as a result of internal social dynamics. In a way, the PBA was not merely a passive recipient nor was it simply forced to adjust to the social conditions set by the inroad of globalization. On the contrary, it was the league that sought to open itself beyond its traditional boundaries to take advantage of the available resources and knowledge from abroad. In summary, the current social changes brought about the closer integration between agency and structure showing how individuals and organizations reorganized their resources to cope with changing economic and social conditions. Globalization, therefore, is not just an

interruption caused by external forces striking nations “from without” but also as an internal process that transforms these societies “from within”. Although its implications spread far beyond the confines of sport, the impact of the recent global upheaval on Philippine basketball and on the PBA, in particular, provides a concrete context where the discourses of social change become a spectacle that is being played out on the glossy surface of the basketball court.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

“As there seems to be little to indicate exactly when basketball was introduced into the Philippine Islands,” the game’s inventor James Naismith wrote, “it is possible that the natives gained their first information of the game through watching the American soldiers stationed there.”¹ Even with the availability of some general facts, the exact origin of Philippine basketball has been shrouded by a seemingly irretrievable beginning that even the person who created the game, was reduced to speculation in his effort to trace its history. There is no precise date of when the game was first played and no specific name of who originally brought it to the Philippines. Instead, available sources only offer broad approximations (i.e. 1905, 1910) and inconclusive profiles of the sport’s pioneers in the country (i.e. soldiers, missionaries).

The presence of this genealogical void contradicts its universal representation of sport, which with the location of the first basketball game at the International YMCA Training School (now Springfield College) in Massachusetts; a well-profiled Canadian inventor; and an exact foundation date (December 1, 1891), provided the game with a uniquely well-documented past. Compared to baseball or football whose evolution from pre-modern games had been almost seamless, basketball due its “scientific invention” had commonly been considered as the first “truly” modern sport. With its relatively recent

¹ James Naismith, *Basketball-Its Origins and Development*, New York: Association Press, 1941): 147.

origin, basketball's introduction in many countries can almost be tracked down to a particular time, place, and personalities. In China, for instance, the game was first played in Tienjin's YMCA on December 5, 1895, and was presided by Dr. Willard Lyon.² This kind of definite information that clearly points out its "modern" beginning has seemed to have been recklessly lost out of bounds as one of the fumbled plays of Philippine sport history.

This clouded origin, however, only added a certain mysterious, if not mythic appeal to the country's most popular game. Like other national and cultural symbols, the "stuffs of legend" that surrounded its ambiguous beginning only made the game more attractive to its followers. Likewise, this lack of a clear beginning has even become almost immaterial in recent years when intrigues, rumors, and gossips, more than concrete facts, have made basketball a popular entertainment and cultural icon in the Philippines.

More importantly, this hazy beginning also enabled the Filipinos to emphasize other milestones of the development of basketball in the country, allowing for greater agency in their reinvention of the American game as an intrinsic part of local culture and traditions. Instead of merely taking account of the place, time and personalities that illustrate how basketball was introduced by the Americans, reconstructing its past or even the simple act of reminiscing its "glorious days", conspicuously draws attention to the long process which permitted what was a foreign sport to take root in the Philippines. Thus after one or two sentences that briefly accounts for its infantile years, the narration of its history

² Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires*.

immediately gives attention to the country's initial success in international competitions, elaborates on the exploits of its basketball heroes, and points out its meteoric rise to its current position as the nation's favorite pastime. In China, the indigenization of basketball has even taken an extreme and more contentious course. Some Chinese sport scholars contend that its beginning in the Middle Kingdom dates back far beyond that fateful day in Tienjin when a YMCA missionary organized the first basketball match. According to them, long before basketball became one of the most popular modern sports, "ancient China [had already] produced a precursor of the game in *shouju*, a form of Tang dynasty handball."³ Following similar threads, the recent history of cricket in India wound up through a new interesting twist when postcolonial theorists (but more popularly expounded in the film *Lagaan*) started to suggest that the widespread popularity of the sport, which was introduced during the British colonial period, was actually bolstered by its similarity to the local game of *gulli-danda*.⁴

In the Philippines, there are no alternative discourses that challenge the American origin of basketball despite the strong emphasis on the Filipinization of the sport in the construction of its history. Surprisingly, nobody has even made reference to its similarity to the long-forgotten indigenous game of *sambunot*, a competition where opposing teams try to score by putting a coconut husk into two separate goals that were made of holes

³ Judy Polumbaum, *Evangelism to Entertainment*, 183.

⁴ Grant Farred, "The Double Temporality of *Lagaan*," in, King, Richard C. and David J. Leonard (eds.), *Visual Economies of/in Motion: Sport and Film*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2006): 85-128.

dug on the ground located on both ends of a rectangular field.⁵ Just like in the case of Indian cricket, claiming that Philippine basketball originated from *sambunot* might be a bit of a stretch but it is something that would be a good measure as to how far some Filipinos would take it to claim the sport as their own. Instead of suggesting that the country's national pastime has originated from *sambunot*, making a contention that the indigenous game had influenced the people's strong *interest* in the American sport given their previous exposure to a similar game would make some sense. Nonetheless, such argument would surely make the origin of Philippine basketball more ambiguous, if not unreservedly contentious.

Just as vague as its origin is the inexplicable factors behind the phenomenal influence of basketball in the Philippines. Since its cloudy beginning, the sport had to live through the volatile periods of the US colonial rule and the Second World War; contended with another highly-popular American game; endured an almost endless episodes of failures in major international tournaments since the 1970s; survived an equally long political and economic crisis; and struggled in deflecting the detrimental impact of globalization. On top of these, basketball was incessantly hounded by a huge number of critics and skeptics who questioned the "fitness" of the vertically-challenged Filipinos to thrive in "the game of the giants." Finally, the rising popularity of other sport disciplines such as badminton and billiards, likewise, has continued to challenge the long-term viability of basketball as the country's national pastime.

⁵ By the 1930s, a ball (i.e. football, volleyball, or basketball) was more often used in place of a coconut husk. See Bureau of Public Schools, *Philippine Games for Physical Education*, (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1952). US-LOC.

Basically, the research started with two important goals in sight: to uncover the exact beginning of basketball in the country and to identify the various factors, which contributed to its meteoric rise to the pinnacle of Philippine sports. Although this work contributes very little in achieving the first objective (even after a long and exhaustive investigation that was conducted both in the Philippines and in the United States), it provides a more extensive engagement of the latter.

WHY IS BASKETBALL POPULAR?

“It is often said that ‘base ball follows the [American] flag,’ so far as the Philippines is concern,” Elwood Brown noted, “this statement is equally true of basket ball.”⁶ A reference to the US colonial era in the Philippines could often hold up an inquisitive query on the incongruous popularity of basketball in the country. The association of the sport with modernity and “the promise of progress” during this period essentially endeared it to many Filipinos. With greater access to education and other opportunities, they saw in basketball the thrilling and emancipating possibilities of the democratic system that the American regime was trying to introduce. Ironically, the game also became a venue for the Filipinos to challenge the hegemony of the colonial power. Hence, basketball represents the contradicting sense of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship of the Philippines with the United States, even long after the latter gained its independence.

⁶ *Spalding’s Official Basket Ball Guide, 1913-14*, (New York: The American Sports Publishing Co., 1914): 189. US-LOC.

Nonetheless, the strong American influence that was firmly established by almost half a century of colonial rule is not the only reason behind the widespread popularity of basketball in the Philippines. There are several other major factors that were explored in the previous discussions. Basically, each of the previous chapters has been outlined to respond to the problem: *Why is basketball popular in the Philippines?* The following assertions have been identified in response to this question, which mainly served as the study's point of orientation. First, the earlier paragraph have already expounded on how basketball served as one of the channels in the US colonial regime's effort to "Americanize the Filipinos," thereby attracting avid following especially after building a reputation as the "modern sport". Second, the game forged a strong association with the emerging nation-state, which made use of its initial success in international competitions as a symbol to promote national unity and as a venue to gain foreign recognition. This turn of event resulted in the "Filipinization of basketball," a process highlighted by the juxtaposition of its development into the country's most popular sport with the decline of baseball, America's favorite pastime. Hence, within the period that was covered by these two historical periods, basketball has evolved from a little-known colonial tool to a pervasive national symbol.

Third, on top of the important achievements that basketball has attained from the 1910s to the 1960s, the most important reason that accounted for the sustained development of basketball beyond this period was its ability to adapt to the changing times. In the "Hollywoodization of Hoops," this historical-sociological inquiry presented how the evolution of the sport into an important icon of popular culture enabled basketball to

weather crucial obstacles that endangered its long-term survival. After over fifty years of notable showing in international competitions, the god fortune of the country's national basketball team started to dwindle and eventually went on a long freefall, making it unable to fully recover until today. During this time, the frustrations over the series of setbacks in its long bid to recapture the country's dominance in regional basketball tournaments resulted in numerous criticisms on what many thought as the "undue emphasis" on basketball in Philippine sports.

Fortunately, the increased influence of American popular culture since the Cold War period has ushered in the rise of visual mass media and the subsequent influx of American "cultural products" in the country. The advance of Hollywood movies, rock n' roll and other music genre, and major league sports transformed the local cultural landscape. In particular, the strong commercial and cultural appeal of the NBA, the American professional basketball league, brought an inspiration for the renewal of the local hoops scene. With the establishment of the country's professional league in 1975, Philippine basketball evolved from an externally-oriented national symbol to an domestically-focused entertainment spectacle that was closely linked to the local showbiz industry. Thus the evolution from *national* to *cultural*, wherein the popularity of basketball ceased to be fueled by its success in international competitions but by the star appeal of its players in its "Hollywoodized" pro-league. The expansion into a prominent entertainment spectacle not only helped maintain its position as the premier sport but also enabled basketball to further advance its influence in the country.

Fourth, part of the appeal of Philippine basketball, likewise, lies in its representation as a “game of the masses” that embodies the ideals and sentiments of the millions of poor and marginalized Filipinos. This was a major divergence from its early years during the American colonial period when basketball was regarded as the “bourgeois sport” because of the strong following from the educated, middle-class sector of society. This process of “popularization,” nonetheless, is not unique to Philippine basketball since almost any major sport around the world (e.g. cricket, soccer) have undergone this crucial shift, which generally served as the foundation of their widespread appeal. Beyond this important turn of event, however, the study also contends that the popularity of basketball in the Philippines partly hinges on the sport’s evolution into a subaltern spectacle, an important site where the struggles of ordinary people are symbolically played out in the basketball arena. Generally, while “rooting for the underdog” in the game floor (or in front of the television), the local basketball followers are clearly not only cheering for their favorite teams but also for themselves, and for the many other real underdogs outside the playing court.

Lastly, the advent of globalization brought a surge of new ideas, technologies, and resources that swept over the earth, reshaping its entire economic, political, and cultural landscape. Philippine basketball was likely to be strolling around at the break point, when this colossal wave of change reached land. The force of this impact pushed the local history of the game fifty to even more than a hundred years back as globalization, after a while, increasingly appeared more like the dreaded neo-colonialism, a close reminder of the almost five decades of political and economic marginalization during the US colonial

regime. Nevertheless, the changes also generally brought a refreshing splash, especially to the sagging professional league that was in dire need of fresh ideas and energy. The entry of Filipino-foreign players in the PBA, for instance, made the league more exciting and competitive. Moreover, the greater accessibility of the NBA, America's premier basketball league, also added a new treat to the usual list of local hoops fare that was already starting to get blander each day. Even the long-mothballed amateur basketball scene was having a period of revival. The inter-collegiate competitions, in particular, started to regularly fill huge arenas and primetime television slots, feats that were previously only associated to the PBA, the country's premier league.

Overall, the process globalization has indeed helped further boosts the popularity of basketball in the Philippines at the turn of the 21st century. However, an interesting exception to this positive development was the detrimental impact of this extensive transformation on the country's top national league, the PBA. Specifically, the NBA competed for television viewership share and for overall fan attention, the rise of the amateur leagues resulted in the over-saturation of the local basketball scene, and a number of popular Filipino-foreign players got involved in illegal drug, fraud, and other high-profile controversies that tainted the wholesome image that the league had been trying to project as a family entertainment. In short, globalization was beneficial to basketball in general, but not to the national basketball league, which went into an unfortunate decline.

BASKETBALL FROM BELOW

Despite the extensive coverage of this historical-sociological odyssey, the study could not account for all the factors that contributed to the development of Philippine basketball due to some practical and theoretical limitations. Primarily, the previous discussions have mainly covered the issues at the macro-level but, apart from the chapter on the Ginebra fans, provide very limited attention to what was happening at the grassroots level. The analysis of “basketball from below” could highlight the experience and rationalities of the “small players,” to come up with an alternative perspective in our reconstruction of the development of the national sporting culture in the Philippines. This approach has been popular among post-colonial and subaltern scholars for providing a way out to the theoretical trap that often results from the fixation of undoing the empire-colony binary.⁷ Rather than getting stuck in analyzing the complex geopolitical dynamics of postcolonial structures, such as basketball, the examination of everyday culture often reveals a more nuanced illustration of the empire-colony relations. In particular, catching a view of the subaltern’s sense of agency affords us a better understanding of the people’s struggles to “shape their own world and make their own meanings” out of dominant rationalities that overwhelmingly encroaches into their daily lives.⁸

This perspective is crucial in this study since the popularity of basketball in the Philippines has been largely anchored not only on the success of its national team (it has not won in any major international tournaments in almost fifty years now) or the

⁷ Goh Beng Lan. ‘Redrawing Centre-Periphery Relations: Theoretical Challenges in the Study of Southeast Asian Modernity’, in S. Ravi, M. Rutten, and B.L. Goh (eds.) *Asia in Europe, Europe in Asia*, (Singapore: ISEAS and IIAS, 2004): 79-101.

⁸ Goh Beng Lan, *Redrawing Centre-Periphery Relations*, 83.

widespread appeal of its top commercial league (globalization has since threatened its long-time survival). Rather, it is the continued practice and following of ordinary individuals that sustained the prominence of basketball in the country. Particularly, the various personal and social meanings that developed in the people's long engagement with the sport, made it difficult, if not impossible to let go even in times of deep crisis. Thus basketball remained highly popular among many Filipinos despite the fervent criticism about the sport's incompatibility with the people overall physical makeup.

In Philippine historiography, the seminal work of Reynaldo Ileto on the "subaltern-of-the-subaltern" origins of Philippine nationalism is an indispensable source of insight and inspiration. His analysis of how colonial literary forms such as the *pasyon* and the *awit* were used by lower-class Filipinos as mediums of resistance locates the importance of mass-based, popular movements in the struggle for nationalism.⁹ In the same way, people interpret basketball games as "subaltern spectacles" that mirror their predicaments, particularly with the stories of struggles and triumphs that characterize the fate of their favorite players and teams. This dazzling display of excitement and drama (that more likely resembles a primetime soap opera) made the sport more appealing to the Filipino masses, many of whom have long suffered from poverty and marginalization. Thus it is interesting to note that such words as "fanatics" and "irrational" that were used to emphatically dismiss the sentiments of the members of peasant movements in Ileto's work, were also the same terms employed to describe the most avid followers of basketball in the Philippines.

⁹ Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and the Revolution*.

BASKETBALL AND BEYOND

Generally, the preceding discussions present the development of Philippine basketball not only to demonstrate the shaping of the country's sporting culture but also to reveal its close connection to the process of state-formation. Particularly, how basketball figured in the emergence of the Philippine nation-state, was recently captured by Gerald Gems in this all-embracing pronouncement, he said:

Filipinos labored under a long American occupation, accepting American tutelage and sport forms yet denying complete assimilation. Ultimately they rejected English in favor of Tagalog and a variety of local dialects, the Filipino government retained its traditional elitism despite the trappings of a democratic structure, and Catholicism remained intact against the widespread influence of the YMCA and Protestant missionaries. Filipinos eventually eschewed baseball and football, choosing basketball as their national sport. They adapted the Americanization efforts to their own needs and values to produce a new hybrid culture similar to yet distinct from that of the US.¹⁰

Thus from one of the methods employed to “Americanize the Filipinos” basketball became a channel for its subvention. Theoretically, this process directs us back to Bhabha's concepts of “mimicry” and “hybridity,” two highly discussed postcolonial frameworks, which essentially articulate the decolonization of basketball and its incorporation into the local cultural milieu. For one, the concept of mimicry fittingly illustrates the general receptivity of the Filipinos to the colonial reproduction of American infrastructure and ideologies in the Philippines. But rather than a mere case of deliberate replication, the process of cultural assimilation was often pursued as a form of “defense mechanism”. Mimicry became a way of dealing with the external treats by absorbing them into the internal world of the subject where they can be neutralized or alleviated. As part of this strategy, basketball is just one of the areas where the Filipinos

¹⁰ Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 150.

tried to deal with the imperial power while keeping its own cultural traditions intact by appropriating new meanings into the game. On the other hand, hybridity refers to the emerging rationalities that came from the convergence of imperial and local cultures. Hence, the immediate integration of basketball as part of the people's everyday life and cultural consciousness illustrates the incorporation of a "new knowledge" that Filipinos used as a venue to construct and express their national identity.¹¹ As a result, basketball became as deeply ingrained in the Filipino culture as the once-foreign *fiesta* (religious feasts) or *jeepney* (a public utility vehicle), which are both utilized now as symbols of Filipino culture and identity.¹²

Despite the promise of emancipation, however, a sense of tragedy lurks behind the processes of mimicry and hybridity. In the case of Philippine basketball, the lack of resources that prevents the local leagues to expand their market base across the country, like the NBA, or the physical limitations that make it impossible for an aspiring Filipino basketball player to be at par with his/her US counterparts are examples of what Bhabha calls the "slippage" – the moment when the colonized recognizes that he/she will never be like the colonizer.¹³ Thus the Filipinization of basketball is simultaneously a resemblance and a menace, which put him/herself "*as a subject of a difference that is*

¹¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 114.

¹² Introduced by the Spaniards, *fiesta* refers to the Catholic tradition of holding annual celebrations to commemorate feast days of saints and other important Church events. On the other hand, *jeepney* is a popular mode of transport found all over the Philippines, which were initially made out of refurbished surplus military vehicles left by the Americans after the Second World War.

¹³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

almost the same but not quite".¹⁴ This tragedy is shown in the subaltern's absurd attempt to replicate the "foreign" that often fails in the end. What is more disheartening, however, is that even if the subaltern succeeds in its replication, the product is always something that s/he could not completely claim as his/her own. Ultimately, the subaltern comes to a realization that much of its own identity, as Vicente Rafael would describe, "is founded on what it cannot [completely] comprehend, much less incorporate."¹⁵ The dilemma of Philippine basketball parallels the case of baseball in the Dominican Republic, where Alan Kline has noted that despite the Dominican players' excellence in the sport, they still come up short after considering the fact that much of Dominican baseball continues to be controlled by American interests. He further explains:

Because baseball is the only area in which Dominicans come up against Americans and demonstrate superiority, it fosters national pride and keeps foreign influence at bay. But the resistance is incomplete. At an organizational level, American baseball interests have gained power and are now unwittingly dismantling Dominican baseball. Therefore, just when the Dominicans are in position to resist the influence of foreigners, the core of their resistance is slipping away into the hands of the foreigners themselves.¹⁶

Thus sport, as an instrument, product and reflection of colonial/postcolonial history is caught in a situation that Bhabha calls as a "state of ambivalence". On the one hand, it provides opportunities, moments, and promises of liberation from the shackles of colonial and imperial domination. On the other, however, sports enable the colonizer or the empire to develop and maintain technical advantage and cultural dependency that denies the total emancipation of the colonized.¹⁷

¹⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 89. [emphasis included].

¹⁵ Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, xvi.

¹⁶ Alan Kline, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991): 3.

¹⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

As a way out of this theoretical conundrum, the study suggests a post-binary analysis that transcends the colonial fixation in undoing the entanglements that bind the complex empire-colony relations. In general, the formulation of this framework is achieved by giving emphasis on the influence of regional dynamics in the formation of postcolonial and subaltern spaces. It essentially argues that the initial incorporation of certain knowledge and practices from the colonial power is oftentimes only the beginning for the further exploration of other relational possibilities. This is not merely an impassioned rejection of the colonial or hegemonic power but an exploration of other possible orientations of comparison. Hence, instead of merely searching for spaces between oppositional entities for hybrid cultural forms, it attempts to explore a broader range of comparisons that explains the persistence of certain colonial practices and rationalities despite losing their meanings in the current empire-subject dynamics.

Following this approach, the study explores a broader arena of comparison to account for other “players,” which contributed to the development of basketball in the Philippines, instead of merely constructing a narrow and unidirectional contrasting of the Filipino from the American. Throughout the different chapters of this thesis, the development of sports in the Asian region, particularly in China and Japan, has been given important attention to explore its relevance in the analysis of the formation of the national sporting culture in the Philippines. In particular, this specific investigation has conclusively established the role of regional sports competitions in the overall growth of Philippine basketball. For instance, the Philippine teams’ domination of the basketball tournaments

at the Far Eastern Championship Games in the early 20th century served as an important foundation for the widespread popularity of basketball in the country.

At the same time, the American presence in the Philippines, as well its growing influence in the region was mainly met with strong antagonism and resistance. In the Philippines, the US did not really gain the admiration of the Filipinos until the Second World War when the Americans were heralded as their liberator from the brutal Japanese regime. Overall, despite some strong anti-US sentiments, basketball, along with a few other American sports, also continued to grow and thrived not only in many parts of the Philippines, but also in the neighboring countries of Japan and China. In fact, the sustained popularity of the sport in the country, particularly during the Cold War era, can be more appropriately viewed as part of the broader “Americanization of Asia” rather than an exclusive offshoot of the Philippine-American relations. Finally, the recent effort to improve the state of Philippine basketball was motivated not by the usual subaltern preoccupation of engaging and exacting revenge on the former colonial master. Rather, the primary goal in the effort to advance the quality of the game in the past two decades has been focused on regaining its former status as one of the top basketball-playing countries in Asia. Hence, this multi-dimensional vantage point in analyzing postcolonial and subaltern practices not only offers a more comprehensive approach but also accounts for the some of the important elements that are lost in the totalizing juxtaposition of the hegemonic power and the subaltern.

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