

# *The history of sport for a sports country*

## *Presentation*

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*Precisely, what do social historians of sport think and do? They examine sports as social practices, as social formations, or as social texts for the purpose of understanding both the sports and the society. Social historians ask and answer questions about the nature and 'fit' of sports in given times among given peoples, about how and why people constructed particular forms of sport, about the meanings that human agents assigned to sports, about conflicts and social contests evident or played out in sports, about patterns of continuity and change in sporting experiences and structures, and about the social significance of sporting practices in the context of other practices processes and dynamics.<sup>1</sup>*

Internationally, the development of a field of historical investigation on institutionalized corporate practices,<sup>2</sup> namely sports, dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. In Brazil, despite the 'preservation' of the memory of different sports modalities since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, studies on this subject appeared only in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the scholarship on sports in other disciplines in the Social Sciences, namely Anthropology and Sociology, had already achieved some development, due to the pioneering work of scholars such as José Sérgio Leite Lopes, Simoni Guedes, and Roberto DaMatta.

In Brazil, the first steps to develop the field of "History of Sport" — a metonym is used to designate institutionalized corporate practices — did not happen in the discipline of history, but instead in the discipline of Physical Education. This was because, like other subjects only examined by cultural historians, there were questions among historians about the legitimacy of

<sup>1</sup>Nancy Struna, "Social History and sport", *In: Jay Coakley; Eric Dunning, Handbook of Sports Studies*, London, Sage, 2007, p. 187-203.

<sup>2</sup>Certain corporate practices, even with their own peculiarities, have undergone approximate processes of institutionalization and formation of a field around them, with the possibility of being investigated by specific research areas, such as sports, physical education (understood both as a school subject and as an area of knowledge), gymnastics, dance, and alternative physical activities (anti-gymnastics, eutony, yoga, etc.), as well as analogue phenomena that date back to periods previous to the Modern Era (the practices of Greeks, the Roman gladiators, the medieval tournaments, and a large number of ludic manifestations of long existence), among others (such as capoeira).

<sup>3</sup>For more information, see Victor Andrade De Melo; Rafael Fortes, "Sports history in Brazil: an overview and perspectives", *Sport History Review*, vol. 42, n. 2, p. 102-116, 2011.

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the historical practice of sports as a topic of analysis.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the field of Physical Education was undergoing a moment of reevaluation that led to closer proximity with sociocultural studies, counterbalancing, at least momentarily, the strong relationship that this discipline had maintained with experimental biomedical investigations.

It would only be in the first decade of the 21st century that a closer proximity between Sports History and History would occur. This can be noticed through the larger number of thematic symposiums on the history of sports in events organized by the National History Association, articles dedicated to the issue in academic and non-academic journals, and, among other evidence, an increase in the number of dissertations, theses, and academic books on the subject.

This shift grew out of changes in the discipline of history, which has become more receptive to new possibilities of investigation, as well as to the consolidation of Sports History as an institutionalized field, particularly in the past two decades.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the importance of sports in Brazilian society. This was already noticeable in the end of the nineteenth century but gained momentum in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and further development in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>, not only because sport has become one of the main products of the media and the entertainment industry as a whole, but also because Brazil, due to its economic growth and its heightened visibility in the international scenario, will host the two most important global sports events — the Soccer World Cup, and the Summer Olympic Games.

Given the increasing importance of sport events in the country, it is not surprising that this issue has become part of the research agenda by scholars, including historians, who, as Lucien Febvre said, are “sharp examiners of their times”.

This issue of *Tempo* presents an overview of the field of Sports History over the last years. It was organized around debates that have taken place in academic events and journals, as well as debates about the future of this field.

We begin with an article by Wray Vamplew, professor *emeritus* at the University of Stirling, in Scotland/United Kingdom, author of reference books (among them the widely known “*Pay up and play the game: professional sport in Britain, 1875–1914*”), and editor of important academic journals (he is currently editor of the *International Journal of Sport History*). Reflecting a distinguished career in the field of economic history of sports, Vamplew received the award of the year from the *International Society of History of Physical Education and Sport* (ISHPES) in 2011. We think his analysis of the configuration of Sport History in the international scenario will provide a starting point for us to assess the field of Sports History in Brazil and its foundations as it develops further.

The next article is by two young scholars, João Manuel Casquinha Malaia Santos (*Universidade Nove de Julho*), a specialist in economic history of sports, and Maurício Drumond (Sport: Laboratory of Sport History, *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*), who has contributed significantly to sport’s political

<sup>4</sup>For a debate on the small presence of the topic in Brazilian history until the 1990s, see Patrícia Genovez, “O desafio de Clio: o esporte como objeto de estudo da História”, *Lecturas: Educación Física y Deportes*, Buenos Aires, n. 9, 1998.

history, offering an insightful and incisive analysis of the historiography of soccer in Brazil. Since the history of soccer was for a while the primary subject researched in Brazil (it still holds a prominent position on scholars' research agenda, but now it shares it with other history of sports topics), it was necessary to devote attention to the history of soccer, which has been object of faulty, though influential, scholarship in Brazil.

The next article is by Cleber Dias, a researcher at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* who has written extensively on the relationship between sport and urban space. Dias offers a critical appraisal on one of the most discussed themes of this first decade of historical studies: the growth of sport in several Brazilian cities. To avoid ethnocentric stances and to comprehend the plasticity and richness of this phenomenon, it is critical to develop a better understanding of the peculiarities of each one of these experiences.

Silvana Vilodre Goellner, a scholar at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Rio Grande do Sul Federal University), deals with one of the most common themes in the scholarship on sport in Brazil and in the world: the relationship between gender and sports. Goellner draws attention to the necessity of widening the scope of investigations, instead of narrowing it to analyses about women. According to Goellner, it is necessary not only to emphasize the relationship between sports and broader issues but also to undertake an analysis of masculinity, homosexuality, and transgender people.

Augusto Nascimento, a researcher at the Institute for Tropical Scientific Investigation/Lisbon, who works on the history of the former Portuguese colony of São Tomé and Príncipe, and Andrea Marzano, a professor at *Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (Unirio) who works on the history of the former Portuguese colony of Angola, offer an overview of the presence and the importance of sport in the Portuguese colonies in Africa. In a chapter that departs from analytical dichotomies, these two scholars highlight the fact that the practice of sports was utilized by the metropolis and the nativist movement with specific goals.

While the aforementioned articles consist of historiographical assessments of specific sub-fields in the sport history field, the following two articles are study cases. The first is based on documental sources, and the second relies on field work of anthropological nature.

Victor Andrade de Melo, coordinator at Sport – Laboratory of the History of Sport and Leisure, and Marcelo Bittencourt, a specialist in the history of Angola, focus on the *Boletim Geral do Ultramar* (Overseas General Bulletin) to analyze how the Estado Novo regime used sports with the political goal of preserving its overseas empire.

It is worth remembering that the two articles mentioned above derive from an ongoing project by researchers in three Brazilian and two Portuguese institutions that started in 2008. The main purpose of this project is to comparatively investigate the presence of sport in Portuguese-speaking countries. By moving beyond national “barriers”, this project aims at analyzing similarities and differences in regions that are interconnected historically.

An article by Marcos Alvito, coordinator at the Center for the Study and Research on Sport and Society, *Universidade Federal Fluminense*, analyzes a

theme of great visibility: organized soccer fans, which have been the focus of analysis by the media, not infrequently in a superficial and facile fashion. The author calls attention to the need of further studying organized soccer fans, one of the most well-known and important dimensions of sports.

By bringing together scholars who utilize distinct methodological approaches (Comparative, Social, Cultural, and Political Histories), who work in universities of eight different countries and who work on a diverse set of themes, this issue offers a solid overview of historical studies on sports.

It is necessary to acknowledge that much has not been addressed in this special issue. There are themes, approaches, sports practices, and studies all around the country (Brazil). Such a diverse and vibrant field of study cannot be fully represented in a special edition of a journal. Indeed, what can be observed in the present work is the tip of an iceberg, which, “contrary to what actually happens to these enormous blocks of ice, grows while sailing Clio’s waters”.