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A new book about sports fans... The immediate association, at least for a European, interested in football, is the problem of hooliganism, with proto-fascist troublemakers assaulting people, smashing shop windows and setting fire to cars. But when an American writes a book about sports fandom, it tends to deal with the kinds of people that love sports, and why they love sports. In the case of Kevin G. Quinn's new book, *Sports and Their Fans: The History, Economics and Culture of the Relationship Between Spectator and Sport* (McFarland), a considerable part of the book deals with sports rather than its spectators: how expensive sports are for the fans, with extensive statistics about this and other sporting matters American, but also how attractive sports are. Americans love American sports, and especially the four big spectator sports, American football, baseball, hockey and basketball. And if there are any problems in the relationship between sports and the supporters, it is, according to Quinn, when the latter are deceived by the former. Lise Joern, who knows a lot about sports fandom, has read Quinn's book for the Forum, and she was mildly bored by the statistics but fascinated by the fact that the author without hesitation places match fixing on a level with doping.

## The American Sports Fans

**Lise Joern**

Dept. of Sport Science, University of Aarhus

*Kevin G. Quinn***Sports and Their Fans: The History, Economics and Culture of the Relationship Between Spectator and Sport**

259 sidor, hft.

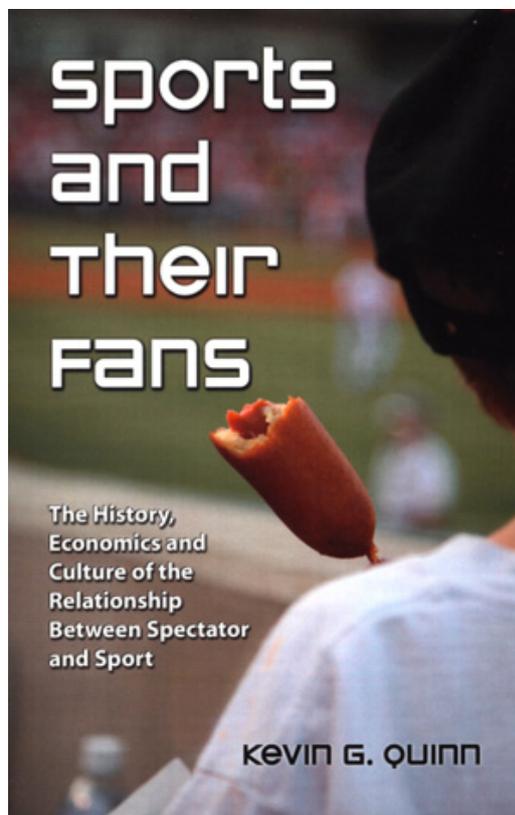
Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2009

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Sports, we know, are big business. China spent more than \$40 billion to host the Olympics, an event dedicated, at least in theory, to showcasing the spirit of amateur athletic achievement. According to Kevin G. Quinn's book *Sports and Their Fans*, sports play an important role in American society. They enjoy tremendous popularity— particularly the so-called Big Four: American football (NFL), basketball (NBA), Baseball (MLB) and ice hockey (NHL). The major leagues of each of these sports enjoy massive media exposure and are considered the preeminent competitions in their respective sports in the world. The preeminence of the major leagues is partially attributed to their strong financial power and huge domestic market.

In 2007 the four major leagues of football, baseball, basketball and the hockey alone accounted for a total of \$16 billion in revenues. Americans spend more than \$25 billion a year on sports and sporting events. The NFL is the most popular North American sports league, boasting strong television ratings and annual league revenue topping \$7 billion. The cost of taking a family of four to an NFL game is over \$300.

For the individual fan, the price can be high, whether it is measured in money or time. In 2007 the average American spent \$330 on cable and satellite television that among other things enables them to watch televised



sports. And then there are the sums lost in office betting pools, the money spent on replica jerseys, parking fees at the stadia, etc.

With costs like these, it's inevitable that people will, from time to time, ask what sort of return the fans get on their investment. Is it the occasional moments of euphoria, or the sense comradeship we feel toward strangers at stadiums and sports bars? Quinn's first answer to that question is: "We spend so much to watch our beloved sports because they mean so much to us" (p. 11). Well.

## History

The first part of Quinn's book outlines the history of U.S. spectator sports. Sports in the colonial United States were usually unstructured, spontaneous activities that the participants initiated, coordinated, and managed. Only in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did organized sport cross the ocean from Great Britain and arrive in America. At that time, urbanization forced a large number of people to live in new settings and to abandon traditional leisure activities, which included drinking, carousing, and gambling. The dominant class sought to replace them with activities such as baseball, horseracing, and boxing.

Setting the stage for future commercialization, industry moved to meet the burgeoning desire for organized sports. The most prominent producer of sports equipment was Albert Spaulding. In 1876, he opened the A. G. Spaulding and Brothers Company. Spaulding's ability to influence the organizers of the various professional sports leagues allowed him to sell his goods and to capture a virtual monopoly on sporting goods by the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growth in sales of sporting goods and services glittered brighter than ever. Although the commercialization of sports slowed during the Great Depression and World War II, by the early 1950s it had solidly established itself as feature of modern Western culture.

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## Sports spectators

In the second part of the book Quinn concentrates more of his attention on the fans. He explores different issues like game uncertainty, fair play, idolization of athletes, and sports addiction. For many people, and for much of the time, sport is almost omnipresent; it is on our televisions, in our newspapers, on the Internet, on the clothes people wear, its advertisements surround us, and it's the subject of people's conversations. The consumption of sport may be very ordinary for many people, but for others it can be very important in their everyday lives, their social networks and identities.

Although the question *why* so many people seem to be addicted to sport stays unanswered by Quinn – there really seems to be somewhat more focus on sports than on spectators – there is not much uninteresting or redundant information in this book. Actually, the biggest issue with the book is that there are a lot of statistics in it (it even contains 20 pages that illustrate the meaning of numbers and statistics in sports). That can, of course, be good or bad, depending on your perspective. If you don't really care about the details of the numbers, then this book might be a tedious read for you. However, you don't have to be a sophisticated fan of American sports (or a fan of statistics) to benefit from Quinn's book. Besides the numbers the book provides the reader with a lot of useful facts and historical details about the correlation between (U.S.) sports and their spectators.

However, one thing that caught my attention is the following quotation:

Poor sportsmanship and sabotage take from fans something they clearly treasure about a sport: its sense of moral virtue. But if sabotage is thievery, then match-fixing is murder, and doping is treason. Conspiracies to predetermine contest outcomes kill that which distinguishes sport from other entertainment. Doping betrays the human dimension that distinguishes athleticism from engineering. These two violations of competitive legitimacy are far worse transgressions against fans' moral sensibilities than poor sportsmanship or even sabotage. (p. 179).

There is no doubt that match fixing is a violation of the essence of sport (i.e. the will to win). Consequently, match fixing is a danger to sport. But asserting that doping violates the spirit of sport (the moral virtue) is just a way of disguising an impulse to moralize that is rooted in one's own personal distaste for the practice. On the deepest level, this is just a way of showing that one does not accept the essence of sport.

Sport is not moral by nature. It is driven, not by an interest in the good, but rather by an interest in the aesthetic. In *Sport, Health and Drugs* Ivan Waddington quotes Joan Ryan's description (from the San Francisco Chronicle) of how she watched on television as baseball player Mark McGwire hit his record-setting home run in 1998. A few weeks before he broke the record, McGwire publicly admitted that he had been taking regular doses of an anabolic

steroid, which was on the list of banned drugs. But nothing in Ryan's writing suggests that McGwire might have behaved in an unsporting or unethical manner. He is portrayed as a true hero.[1] Similarly, despite the doping scandal(s) in the Tour de France there is no evidence of a decline in public support.[2] The rage against doped athletes seems to derive from non-fans rather than true sports fans.

In spite of that example Quinn gives us an interesting look into American spectator sports and its fans.

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[1] Ivan Waddington (2000): *Sport, Health and Drugs*, London: E & FN Spon, p. 89f.

[2] See, for example, John Hoberman (2003): "A Pharmacy on Wheels': Doping and Community Cohesion Among Professional Cyclists Following the Tour de France Scandal of 1998", in Verner Møller & John Nauright (eds.): *The Essence of Sport*, Odense: University of Southern Denmark Press.

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