

# Sport's Moral Contracts: An Analysis of Swedish Sport 1930 to 1950

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*Published on idrottsforum.org 2015-05-22*

**ABSTRACT:** This study examines moral contracts between Swedish society and Swedish sport from 1930 to 1950. The theoretical basis is social contract theory and the methodological basis is a qualitative text analysis. The source material mainly comprises a selection of clippings from contemporary daily newspapers. The results show that during this period, sport actively negotiated a new moral contract. By aligning itself with two pillars of contemporary society, the Church and the adult education movement, sport gained moral gravitas and emerged as a social and popular movement of consequence. This contributed to sport being given the mandate to play a part in the development of the new democratic welfare state that evolved during this period. But one group of people was excluded from the negotiations over what role sport should play in society: women. One explanation is that the requirement that also women should be a part of what sport represented was not a necessary condition to give it legitimacy.

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## Introduction

The transition from earlier, less developed forms of sport to modern competitive sport coincided with the industrialisation of the Western world. Both the means of industrial production and competitive sport may be seen as a result of rational scientific thought, where technology and efficiency, bureaucracy and regulation, and competition and records are all key factors. But despite this rationality, modern sport is contradictory. On the one hand we have sexist jibes, doping, parental pressure, hooliganism and exclusion, and on the other we have fun, togetherness, positive role models, commitment and idealism. There are these two sides to sport, which as a social phenomenon is seen as complex and sometimes paradoxical. One reason for the latter is that the historical sporting values such as idealism and social education are difficult to reconcile with the modern-day entertainment ideal and winning culture. In the winning culture, it has been increasingly acceptable to, in football for instance, dive or not respect the referees' decisions, which flies in the face of the old ideals of fair play, such as respecting the rules, honouring opponents, losing gracefully and accepting decisions (Loland, 1998; Butcher & Schneider, 2007; Tamburrini, 2010).

Broadly speaking, the historical Swedish, and Nordic, sport model rests on the cornerstones of idealism and autonomy. In contrast to, for example, the United States, where market forces, schools and universities are important actors, sport in the Nordic region is rooted in the popular or social movements. It is built on voluntary associations, with voting members working without remuneration. The associations, which have broad social and geographical support, work together with the state, and increasingly with the markets. The Swedish state has given funding to most sports without wanting to control or regulate them to any great extent, a fact that has helped to enable Swedish sport to have a high degree of autonomy in moral issues and, among other things, to make their own rules, rules which have not always been consistent with those of society (Carlsson & Lindfelt, 2010; Norberg, 2002).

Nonetheless, to gain legitimacy, the rules of sport need to win approval from both within the world of sport and society in general. The participants, the sportsmen and women, have to agree on the 'rules of the game' in any given context, and the rules must be accepted in a wider context so that people are happy to get involved in sport and/or to pay to watch sport, and in order for it to be given central and local government funding. Hence, even if sport is autonomous, there needs to be a contract between sport and society

that regulates what is acceptable. What is acceptable has, however, varied over time, and has been affected by twentieth-century processes such as the professionalisation and commercialisation of sport, and also by the attempts to achieve social and gender equality.

Hence, sport having its own rules does not mean it is static, but rather that it develops steadily alongside society in general. The purpose of this article is to investigate whether we can talk in terms of contracts between sport and society, moral contracts that, when they no longer serve their purpose, are renegotiated.

## Literature review

Morality in relation to sport has attracted a number of researchers with different approaches and perspectives. Some, perhaps particularly in the field of sports psychology, have focused on moral action or behaviour in individual athletes, e.g. good and bad behaviour, fair play and aggression. Sport usually takes place in a social context, which means that the athlete has to relate to others. This can bring out what we would call good social qualities: support for teammates and being a good winner and a good loser. But opportunities also present themselves for cheating or injuring competitors, i.e. antisocial behaviour (see, e.g., Kavussanu, 2008; Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009; Weimar, 2012).

Another area is the administration and regulation of sport. Here we include things like organisational management, e.g. investigating codes of ethics in the regulatory frameworks of different sporting organisations and how the codes are applied at various levels (Kihl, 2007) or what effect volunteers might have on an organisation's moral climate (Malloy & Agarwal, 2001). Another aspect in this field is the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Should all forms of performance-enhancing methods and substances be permitted in elite sport or not (Tamburrini, 2000; Petersen & Kristensen, 2009)? If not, then what should be permitted and what should be banned and on what criteria should such decisions be made? Society's moral norms of what is and is not legal? Or sport's ideals of fair play (Carr, 2007; Simon, 2004)?

Another area of research is sport's morality in relation to that of society, a field covering a number of approaches, one of which is gender. Sport has its origins in a patriarchal structure: it began as a male institution and men have dominated for a long time. But gradually, and at an accelerating pace,

sport has opened up for women, as participants, leaders and representatives in decision-making bodies. Despite this, there is still a long way to go before complete gender equality in sport is achieved. One example of this is the objectification and sexualisation of sportswomen in media and advertising (Hargreaves, 1994; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2011). Gender segregation in sport has also been highlighted. While racial segregation is incompatible with the values of the Western world, gender segregation is accepted as natural. American researchers claim that sport is the most gender-segregated secular institution in the United States, even more than the military (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008).

The fact that racial segregation is not tolerated does not, however, mean that there is no racism in sport, in the past or in the present. In a review of sociological research into racism in sport over the last fifty years, sport is shown to be one of the most important areas for researchers who want to understand ‘the contours and complexities of racial formation’ (Carrington, 2013) in different times and contexts. The plight of disabled people has also been noted in studies of discrimination and exclusion (Roux & Burnett, 2010).

## Theoretical basis

The review above shows that sport is an interesting area of research for different types of moral issues. In contrast to the aforementioned research, this study has its theoretical basis in social contract theory, which is based on the assumption that every society is built on rules that are in everyone’s interest to follow. Following rules and norms is a necessary condition for people to be able to live together. The idea that society consists of social contracts between different actors can be traced chronologically from the Enlightenment onwards. For a while, as the Church saw its supremacy beginning to be challenged and its power gradually waning in favour of a secular state, the need began to emerge for the regulation of the new social order, a regulation that would define, legitimise and place limits on the state’s exercise of power. The mutual interdependence between citizens and the state was regulated in visible contracts (e.g. legislation) and invisible contracts (e.g. society’s expectations), where the rights and duties of both parties were stipulated (Reid, 2011; Kimmel, Craigh Smith and Klein, 2011; Ellis, 2006). Social contract theory has, however, been criticised by, among others, feminist researchers for neglecting the fact that the contracts are, in many instances, not drawn

up between equal parties and subordinate groups are not visible. The theory is too often put forward as a story of freedom for all, but, in actual fact, its scope is limited to white males (Pateman & Mills, 2007).

Thus, according to the theory, society contains both visible and invisible contracts, both of which are, to a great extent, the expression of moral agreements that constitute ethical collective principles about what is right and proper in a given situation, and what is not. Sport also has moral contracts to adhere to, even if elite sport seems to have its own moral rules that are not always consistent with those of society in general. The nature of the contracts has, of course, changed over time, and contracts themselves have had to be reformulated when the sportsmen and women, the sporting public and/or society no longer accepted them. However, these reformulations are preceded by negotiations over the content of the new contract. It is these negotiations during a defined period, 1930 to 1950, which I have aimed to capture and analyse with the help of some examples.

Historically, contemporary Swedish sport, with its specific branches, has its roots in the 1880s, when rowing, skating and cycling became organised, followed by other sports such as athletics and skiing in the subsequent decade. Organised sports were competitive as well as a offering recreation, health and togetherness. But the overall trend was towards 'sportification', i.e. towards increased specialisation, rationalisation and quantification, centred around performance and competition. In 1903, the Swedish Sports Confederation was formed as a national amateur sports organisation. Even though membership of the confederation increased from thirty-five associations to six hundred in 1914, the major breakthrough did not come until the interwar period. By 1939, the number of member associations had reached 5,790. An important reason for this rise was that sport, which until then had been mainly an urban phenomenon, spread throughout the country during this period while also broadening socially. Initially, sport was labelled middle class, making the workers' movement view it with suspicion. During the interwar period, this resistance weakened, though, as it did in the countryside, where sport had been met with great scepticism. The growth of the sports movement continued after the Second World War (Norberg, 2002).

The rise of sport coincided with the period in Swedish history when the democratic welfare state was founded and further expanded. A new society took shape, a society based on a new principle: the inhabitants would no longer be rulers and subjects but rather citizens. This transformation presupposed training and education in a number of areas so that inhabitants became citizens in the 'right' way. The nineteenth century's growing secu-

larisation had resulted in a situation where the institution that had hitherto been responsible for nurture, control and education, the Church, became irrelevant and needed to be replaced. A number of both public and civil society actors took part in this process of change. One of those was the sports movement, which quickly took on an educational role (Norberg, 2002).

Even though social contract theory has been criticised for making some groups invisible, I believe it is still a valuable starting point in the analysis of the negotiations between sport and other social actors, and of great interest is to establish who took part in the negotiations and who did not, and, not least, whom the negotiations concerned.

## Methodology

The methodology used in this study is a qualitative text analysis. Text analysis, in this case, implies a systematic analysis of primary data collected from various types of text where the method of analysis can be either quantitative or qualitative in nature. In this case, it is qualitative since moral ideas expressed in the assembled texts have been noted. The source material consists of various media, in particular the daily press. The reason for this is that media is a significant source when forming a picture of what social issues are being debated and how they are being debated. As we know, media is instrumental in the creation of values and attitudes, supplying us with knowledge of what is expected of us and what we can expect of others. Media functions as a compass, not infrequently a moral compass, which helps us navigate in life. Nowadays, we speak of mediated experiences, i.e. experiences that we have gained from the media and made into our own. We adopt the mediated experience when our own personal experiences are not enough (Markula, 2009; Cotter, 2001). In this way, media influences us greatly – whether we realise it or not. This is also true of sports issues.

With regard to this study, it was mainly in the press that the inadequacies, virtues and tasks of sport in society were debated. The Sigtuna Foundation Clipping Archive (Sigtunastiftelsens klipparkiv) has been used for the collection of data. It is one of the biggest collections of press articles in Sweden. The material covers almost the whole of the twentieth century and is divided by subject according to the SAB system used by Swedish public libraries for book classification. Newspaper articles are cut out and kept in envelopes in chronological order. For most of the clipping archive's lifetime, all the newspaper articles on any given subject, including sport, have

been kept. Many of the major papers have been documented from the very beginning, while the selection of minor newspapers has varied. Geographically, the whole of Sweden is included. In order also to have an inside view, from inside the sports movement, that is, the material from the clipping archive has been supplemented with the Swedish Sports Confederation's periodical, *Svensk Idrott* (Swedish Sport).

The data analysis involved carefully reading all the twentieth-century articles categorised under sport. They were then re-read to identify areas where a moral negotiation could be discerned. Two clear areas became apparent. The first was sport's relation to the Church and to the cultural movement in the form of educational associations and study circles. The second was what was seen as the educational potential of sport in relation to its alleged negative aspects. The period chosen for the analysis was the 1930s to the 1950s. This is when sport made a widespread breakthrough in Sweden and became a mass movement.

## Sport versus spirituality and adult education

The growth of sport during the first three decades of the twentieth century was, as indicated above, not totally painless. The labour movement, the farming community and the Church were among those who criticised the sports movement. The labour movement's criticism was that sport at the beginning of the twentieth century was associated with social phenomena that it opposed: royalism, the upper classes, nationalism and militarism. Some parts of the labour movement also saw sport as holding back culture and education. But in the late 1920s, the labour movement began to work together with the sports movement, and the Social Democratic leadership spoke favourably of the latter. This may well have been due to how popular sport had become among party members and sympathisers. The farming community and their political representatives were also expressly anti-sport in the early twentieth century. Why should country folk who spent their days doing manual labour out in the fresh air do sport in their spare time? People who wanted exercise should go out and chop wood or dig the garden, activities that would be good for their bodies and the economy. As with the labour movement, this criticism began to wane during the late 1920s (Lindroth, 2002).

At the time when sport was becoming established in Swedish society, the Church was very powerful: its values pervaded society and its represen-



tatives were people in authority who prescribed what people should think and how they should live their lives. When sport entered the picture, the representatives of the ecclesiastical bodies certainly recognised the benefits of physical activity, but the criticisms outweighed this. Central to this was that sport was seen as a means of de-Christianising young people. Basically, it had to do with the battle for Sundays. Should Sundays and public holidays be spent at church services and resting in observance of the Sabbath, or doing sports (Lindroth, 2002)?

The common denominator for the critical groups was the idea that sport had a dumbing-down effect. It seduced young people, luring them away from cultural activities and values that previous generations had evolved, which negatively affected the country's intellectual development. How much valuable time was being frittered away on the sports fields? During the 1930s, the fact that sport was making great strides, however, prompted different reactions from, for instance, the Church and the adult education movement. A desire to cooperate could be discerned, leading to the Sigtuna Meeting (Sigtunamötet) of 1931. This had been preceded by a meeting the year before, a meeting that had come about on the Church's initiative. Although this meeting had attracted press attention, the upshot was that extremely little was achieved and the following year another meeting on the topic of cooperation was held, and this time the initiative came from the sports movement (Forsberg, 1995).

The idea of the meeting was to allow representatives of the sports movement, the Church and the adult education movement (e.g. educational associations, cultural societies and the Swedish school system) to meet and try to establish some form of cooperation; some kind of cross-fertilisation that would ultimately benefit everyone. Somewhat simplistically, sport was popular but it was deemed superficial, while the adult education movement was viewed as serious and beneficial. The meeting was opened by Sweden's Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf, who was chairman of the Swedish Sports Confederation. Who had benefited the most from whom is open to debate, but for the sports movement, according to the press, it was about improving its image from that of a "manifestation of the most uncivilised anti-culture".<sup>1</sup> The sports movement stressed that sport was useful and there was a need to work together with the cultural sectors of society to give it other values besides the purely physical ones, namely an ethical deepening.<sup>2</sup>

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1 'utslag av mörkaste okultur', *Stockholmstidningen*, 12 January 1931.

2 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 8, 1930; *Arbetet*, 12 January 1931.



Under a slogan proclaiming that young people were not there for the sake of the sports associations or the study circles, but rather vice versa, the participants at the meeting concurred that there was a need to work together both centrally and locally. A number of proposals were aired. One was to divide young people between the two movements according to age. Up until the age of twenty, the focus would be on education, with minor, simpler sporting elements. The true sports age was seen to be twenty, after which considerable space would be given to competitive sport and less to education. Another suggestion was to devise a decathlon with an assortment of events in the form of mental arithmetic, orienteering, history, swimming, nature studies, etc. A third proposal was to have combined associations whose programmes would include both cultural and sporting elements. A sportsman, the thinking went, should naturally be interested in learning basic physiology and nutrition or languages.<sup>3</sup>

The sports movement also received support at the meeting from the spiritual and cultural representatives on the issue of legitimacy. For example, football had come under criticism for its roughness, something the meeting's participants thought was due to major public interest creating the economic incentives for a rougher game. The meeting resulted in the participants declaring their awareness of the problem and expressing the hope that football would develop differently.<sup>4</sup> The fact that an issue like this was being discussed seriously by trustworthy social actors showed the sports movement to be responsible, a social force to be reckoned with.

A continuation of the Sigtuna Meeting took place in the media. For example, in 1936, there was a radio discussion between representatives of the sports and adult education movements, again under the leadership of the chairman of the Swedish Sports Confederation, Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf. The Crown Prince said he wanted to build on the consensus and vision that had, he maintained, been present at the meeting in Sigtuna. He also expressed the belief that the meeting had led to greater moral demands within the sports movement, while a broader understanding of sport by the Church and the adult education movement could be discerned. The theme of the discussion was spiritual and physical health in relation to leisure time.<sup>5</sup>

The initiative for the radio discussion came from the sports movement this time as well, which shows the significance it attached to the dialogue with the Church and the adult education movement. The radio discussion at-

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3 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 13, 1931, and no. 40, 1935.

4 *Stockholmsstidningen*, 19 November 1931.

5 *Stockholmsstidningen*, 3 April 1936.

tracted considerable attention and was reported in the press. With the help of some spiritual and cultural heavyweights, the sports movement succeeded in further increasing its moral and cultural depth.

Another collaborative project observed by the press was the publication of the book *Idrotten – andlig beredskap?* (Sport: Spiritual Preparation?) in which representatives of the Church and the adult education and sports movements reflected on the theme of the title. The Church representatives supported the initiative, and concerns over the success of sport in Sweden were evident throughout the foreword. Nonetheless, the book did try to stress the moral potential of sport by showing that there were two ways of understanding the phenomenon: as a soulless, purely physical, dumbing-down practice, and as one with moral potential. Commenting on the book, the sports movement pointed out that the divide between the Church and sport was closing, even going as far as to say that the fact that sport's role as a good educator of young people was generally accepted, provided that there was a link between the practising of sport and moral bearing.<sup>6</sup>

The moral bearing alluded to is a certain “chivalry”, a spirit of fair play encapsulating qualities such as honesty, self-control, comradeship and magnanimity in defeat, a bearing that shared similarities with muscular Christianity. Muscular Christianity originated in England in the mid-nineteenth century as a Christian approach to physical activity, health and manliness, which can be traced back to the New Testament's call for physical exertion and physical health: looking after one's body is not just accepted in the Bible but is even stressed as something important and desirable. As it was the duty of a Christian to keep his body strong and fit, sport and training were seen as paths to good health, good morality and proper Christian thinking. In the mid-nineteenth century, muscular Christianity was instituted as part of the teaching system in the British public schools with the aim of strengthening the Christian moral elements in the schooling of boys to become the future leaders of the British Empire, for which values such as courage, honour, self-control and honesty were important. This ideal spread to the Continent and particularly to North America, where it reached its apogee between 1880 and 1920 (Putney, 2001; Robinson, 2007; Watson, 2007).

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6 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 40, 1940; *Svenska Dagbladet*, 10 January 1941.

## The negatives of sport versus its educational potential

In the discussions between the sports movement, the Church and the adult education movement described above, another aspect of sport also came in for criticism: sometimes it gave rise to drunkenness and disorder. Was sport, as one newspaper put it, young people's friend or foe?<sup>7</sup> In the case of drunkenness, the press partly criticised athletes and organisers for consuming alcoholic beverages. It could, for example, be football teams that after a match drank so much that during the train journey home their behaviour became unacceptable and they had to be taken into custody by the police. Or the case of the course setter for an orienteering competition who made some mistakes due to intoxication and ruined the race for all seven hundred competitors.<sup>8</sup>

But the press also reported "drunkenness" among the spectators. One example concerned some of the spectators watching the "Rämenloppet", the Swedish Winter Grand Prix, held in the 1930s on Lake Råmen, which was part of the European Drivers' Championship. The amount of alcohol consumed by the spectators on the train journey there and back led to the press dubbing it the 'drunkards' Grand Prix'. Other examples reported were excessive drinking among the crowds in the stadiums. At the Swedish national stadium, Stockholms Stadion, drunk people were to be found not only in the stands but particularly in the toilets, where "the horrors that . . . take place cannot be described". Most of the authors of the articles claimed the reason that so many drank excessively was that the sports movement's representatives did not take a strong enough stand against alcohol.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1930s, the press coined the phrase "idrottens svans" (the dregs of sport) for this category of unruly sports fan. For representatives of the sports movement, these unruly sports fans were an unwanted element that brought the very institution they were defending into disrepute. The press particularly bemoaned what the alcohol culture that accompanied sport might entail for young people. For all the positives sport might offer, this could be the downfall of the young and of sport itself. How did the sports movement's representatives deal with the problem?

Those at the heart of the sports movement made sure they renounced alcohol and drunkenness among competitors and spectators. To overcome the

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7 *Arbetet*, 31 July 1941.

8 *Svenska Morgonbladet*, 2 September 1937.

9 *Svenska Morgonbladet*, 30 July 1934; *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 29 July 1934.

problem among competitors, athletes who were drunk were given short or lengthy bans and the Swedish Sports Confederation encouraged the specialized sports federations to inform their sportsmen and women that drunken behaviour did not bring honour to them or their sport. In the case of the spectators on the train journeys to and from the sporting events, football matches, etc., where drunkenness was a problem, the sports movement's representatives contacted the railway operators to see whether they could work together on the issue. They also joined forces with the local temperance societies to try to have soberer crowds in the stadiums.<sup>10</sup>

But they also negotiated their moral contract with society by stressing the educational potential of sport. Previous research shows that, historically speaking, patriotism has created a kind of sporting **über**-ideology: sport would strengthen and bring honour to the country. Not surprisingly, there were also military motives; sport was a means of aiding the defence of the country, enhancing the qualities needed in a war. After the First World War, these character-forming elements became more important (Lindroth, 2002). This is also true of the 1930s and 1940s. The negatives attributed to sport in the shape of drunkenness and fighting, etc., were contrasted with sport's ability to attract young people at risk of going off the rails. First, the sports movement's representatives maintained that the training sportsmen must undergo to achieve success must naturally involve taking a stand against alcohol and unhealthy living in general. Second, it was a means of eliminating youth criminal gangs.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, they wanted to stress that sport had an important preventive role in society. But sport was also seen as operating on a more structural level, when it was claimed that it was character-forming: it developed desirable mental qualities like self-discipline, single-mindedness and camaraderie. According to the sports movement's representatives, it was "a well-known fact that a good sportsman usually becomes a good citizen".<sup>12</sup> However, there is nothing strange about the representatives of sports movements in Sweden and abroad, in the past and now, stressing the educational aspects of sport. Along with physical health and the virtues that can be linked to the idea of fair play, in youth sport there are also areas related to educational upbringing. The idea that sport is beneficial to the development of both the individual and society is held even today by many around the world and is rarely questioned (Park, 2008; Coakley, 2011).

10 *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 29 July 1934; *Nässjö-Tidningen*, 20 November 1931.

11 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 29, 1930; *Svenska Dagbladet*, 4 June 1941; *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 12 January 1949.

12 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 30, 1937.

As a counter to the drunkenness and disorder, that were indeed clearly a part of it, sport was highlighted as a way of achieving better public health. The industrial revolution had, for instance, increased the demand for intellectual skills, which, together with the fact that machines were replacing human labour, meant that the importance and development of the body had been pushed into the background. Sport could be instrumental in making the body and physical health an important part of the construction of society once more, and by improving health and well-being, it was even seen as being able to reduce public spending.<sup>13</sup>

Another powerful argument in favour of sport in the negotiations over what role it would play in society was the issue of democracy. By having an equalising effect on the social classes and promoting democratic behaviour, making athletes “good comrades”, it became a democratic project. The rules of sport were the same for everybody irrespective of where they came from; if you overstepped the mark in long jump, it would be considered a no-jump regardless of who you were. Moreover, people who would never have met otherwise came face to face on the sports field:

Here the (perhaps) spoiled sons of the upper classes come and meet young people of the same age dressed in workers' overalls [...] and discover, perhaps to their surprise, that the working-class lads have minds just as nimble as their legs. And so camaraderie can blossom where splendid isolation once reigned. And the lower classes [...] in turn see how even mummy's spoiled little boys could be real gems, and in this way, lifelong friendships could be formed, right there on the sports field. That is democracy!<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting to consider how we should view sport in relation to democracy. Sport was undeniably an important part of the democratisation of the Nordic countries from the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The sports associations that emerged became inclusive and meeting places across the generations, social classes and sometimes town and country. Moreover, membership of a sports club entailed a schooling in democracy. Young people learned how to conduct themselves at a meeting – requesting the floor, debating and voting – but also how a democratic decision must be abided by even if you were not in the majority yourself (Kayser Nielsen & Bale, 2012).

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<sup>13</sup> *Svensk Idrott*, no. 29, 1930, and no. 7, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> *Arbetet*, 31 July 1941.

The belief that sport is instrumental in the creation of democratic societies is held elsewhere in the world as well. But sport has also been criticised for having a segregating effect and for promoting racist and patriarchal structures (Dyreson, 2001). There are tensions between elite and grass-roots sport, whose representatives have different aims. While the former's objectives are the organisation's efficiency and performance, the latter emphasises values linked to democracy and representation (Steen-Johnsen & Hanstad, 2008). In other words, sport would seem to have the potential to both develop and divide societies; to unite and to segregate.

## Who negotiated and whom did the negotiations concern?

The negotiations on what role sport should play in Swedish society relate to sport on a more structural level. But if we break it down to the individual and group level, the question arises: whom did the negotiations concern? Whom were the negotiations actually on behalf of and who did the negotiating?

On the question of who was doing the negotiating at that time, the answer is simple: men; men, the majority of which held high positions in society: bishops, headmasters, corporate executives, senior military officers, chief editors and even the Crown Prince of Sweden. The other question, on behalf of whom they were negotiating, is clear as well: men and boys. From the account given above, it is clear that the cultural phenomena that sport positioned itself against during this period were spirituality and adult education, represented by the Church and educational associations. In the case of the Church, the object of the discussion during the period was always a "he". An example of this is the sermon given in 1930 in which the Swedish archbishop dealt with the merits of sport in looking after the body, and also virtues such as self-control and great comradeship. Even though the archbishop was not overly enamoured with sport, seeing the dangers of it, he still maintained that sport was there for the young man.<sup>15</sup> The archbishop was not alone, however. Other representatives of the Church stressed the importance of sport for young men and the churches' work with boys. Sport was, for example, described as a way for the Church to reach boys. And not just any

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<sup>15</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, 20 January 1930.

boys; with the help of sport, it would hopefully be possible to reach another type of boy than the one normally attracted to the Church:

...the energetic, lively type of boy, so key to the world of young people. The boys who set the tone, who form opinion, who have influence among their friends. The lively, fearless types, red-blooded boys. Those boys with so much potential, who do not fall at the first hurdle, who one may take on face to face, trade blows with, in affairs of young peoples' lives.<sup>16</sup>

Discussions with Church representatives only focused on boys and young men – girls and young women were not even mentioned. The same is true of the sports movement's discussions with representatives of the adult education movement. The young people that they felt would benefit from collaboration between sport and adult education were the males. For instance, they should have the opportunity to combine sport with studies in languages, nutrition, physiology, psychology, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Even the educational potential of sport had boys and adolescent men in mind. The young people and the adults who needed sport, the sports movement vigorously argued, were solely men and boys. It was boys that sport would save from the world of crime and other social ills; sport would transform "ruffians into gentlemen", as one newspaper put it.<sup>18</sup> And the great virtues with which the sports movement's negotiators claimed, sport could contribute in the long run, e.g. self-discipline, self-control, presence of mind, ability to adapt and selflessness, only pertained to men. The same applied to the benefits of being able to compete with all it entails in terms of validation and significance:

The competition is for him the moment of truth, where the results of weeks and months of practice are put to the test. [...] He smiles at those who mock, sorry deep inside that they did not get to feel the same joy as him, the same sensory power inside.<sup>19</sup>

The quote above is representative of how the protagonists during this period expressed themselves: the pronoun was always he or him. This was despite the fact that Swedish women had been competing in sport and had been

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16 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 5, 1930.

17 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 40, 1935.

18 *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 12 January 1949; *Arbetet*, 31 July 1941.

19 *Svensk Idrott*, no. 2, 1930.



doing so since the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, women took part in the swimming and diving competitions. In addition to this, they also practised and competed in figure skating, equestrianism, cycling and gymnastics. There were Swedish championships in all of these disciplines before 1915 (Olofsson, 2002). There is no record of this in the source material.

## A summary discussion: negotiating morals

Is it reasonable to talk of moral contracts and negotiations between the Swedish sports movement and Swedish society during the period 1930 to 1950? I believe so and I intend to describe below what the contract was like before 1930 and at the end of this period. Before the discussions began with representatives of the Church and the adult education movement, sport was associated with dumbing-down and uselessness. The discussions and cooperation that took place with prominent representatives of the Church and the adult education movement helped the sports movement to nuance this image. By being a proxy for and articulating society's opposition in an organised way, the representatives of the Church and cultural movements could assume the role of the opponents in the negotiations while acting as collaborative partners. With the help of their societal importance and the serious discussions that were held, the sports movement could demonstrate greater depth and responsibility.

Now, it is always open to debate as to which side the discussions were more important to. When the discussions began in the early 1930s, the Church's status in society was high, as was that of the educational associations. The sports movement's trump card was that it belonged to the future and was becoming increasingly popular, particularly with young people. My assessment is that the discussions were of primary importance to the sports movement, since by being acknowledged as a participant in the discussions with two pillars of society, it acquired some of their status and hence gained further legitimacy. Evidence of this is seen in how the sports movement, after the first tentative meeting, took the initiative to hold more meetings and in the comprehensive press coverage of these, not least in the movement's own periodical, *Svensk Idrott* (Swedish Sports). This was an important sequence of events. Interestingly enough, the discussions with representatives of the Church and the adult education movement ceased when the sports movement had become an established part of society in the 1950s. By then it

had reached children and young people at every level of society. Thus sport had achieved a position in society where it no longer needed moral support from others, or at least not from the Church and the education associations.

In the moral debates where the negative aspects of sport were addressed, mostly in the media by way of polemical articles and interviews with the leading representatives of the sports movement, the movement was also able to demonstrate social responsibility and usefulness. It was not just a superficial leisure-time pursuit. After all, the popularity of sport did have the drawback that it attracted people who gave it a bad reputation. To avoid falling into disrepute, the sports movement's representatives took a strong stand against drunkenness and general unruliness. Moreover, the educational potential of sport was highlighted as a powerful argument. In this, the sports movement could point to the success of its preventive work with young people, and in the process of creating good citizens also argue for what it might achieve in the long run. To put this study in a social context, Sweden at the beginning of the twentieth century was a country moving away from an agricultural society towards an industrialised society. The structural transformation that the country was going through also meant that the social classes were being reformed. A new upper class consisting of the owners of real and financial capital and the administrators of the state apparatus was created while a new middle class comprising small traders, civil servants and farmers emerged together with a new industrial working class, each with its culture, ideals and norms. The twentieth century was also the century of democracy, where the Swedish constitutional reforms of 1918–21 are usually known as the democratic breakthrough in Sweden, e.g. women were enfranchised. One result of the reforms was that the electorate went from 19 per cent in 1911 to 54 per cent in 1921. There were still huge class differences, however, as could be seen, for instance, in a number of labour market conflicts. During the 1920s, Sweden was also one of the most strike- and conflict-prone countries in Western Europe (Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004).

In this huge social transformation that Sweden underwent in a relatively short period of time, there was a need for stabilising forces. Sport laid claim to being a good educator of citizens and generally a democratic project. Besides being character forming and having an equalising effect as a meeting place for the new social classes, sport was also teaching young people throughout the country sound democratic practises in the clubs and federations that were formed.

So in the new contract, the sports movement came across as a serious actor that assumed responsibility for the development of the democratic

Swedish welfare state. Thus sport achieved a position in society, a force to be reckoned with. But not everyone was included in the process. The negotiations only concerned men in sport. It was not that women were treated differently, rather they were not part of it at all, not as negotiators and not as part of the group being negotiated for. What sport could contribute in the new social order only applied to men even though women unquestionably took part in sports. They even competed in the Olympics. One explanation for why they were not included might be that this was quite simply in conformity with the norms of society at the time. Putting forward an argument for what sport could give women and why they too should practise sports was not a necessary condition for sport to be granted legitimacy as a pillar of society. The sports movement's gender equality contract was not seriously negotiated until the 1960s and 1970s, negotiations that are still ongoing.

In conclusion, I suggest that the sports movement actively negotiated a new moral contract during the period 1930 to 1950. By allying itself with important pillars of society and stressing its role as a pillar in its own right in the development of the emerging new society, the movement gained legitimacy and a mandate to continue its work, a mandate that is visible not least in each successive increased government grant (Norberg, 2002).

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