

Early Commercialisation in Sport

Looking for Evidence and Searching for Meaning

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When sports historians have looked at commercialism and sport, they have paid too much attention to the mass spectator, gate-money sport that developed from the late nineteenth century in Europe and North America. Here it is argued that this takes too narrow a definition of commercialisation which instead should consider all economic/monetary transactions involving sport. This new definition has significant implications for when we can say that sport and commerce were becoming intertwined. Even in Ancient Greece and Rome, there is significant information on commercial activity involved with sport, including regularly organised events, large-capacity sports stadiums, sports entrepreneurship, professional athletes with trainers and free agency, sports tourism, and gambling on sport. Professional knights, regular tournaments and teaching professionals for the Medieval and Renaissance periods also make it clear that commercialisation in sport did not infer

modernisation of sport. Although sport had changed in these later eras, this is immaterial to the argument which sees commercialisation as something existing at a point in time with no necessary links forwards or backwards chronologically. A model for assessing the level of commercialisation in any sport at any time is proposed.

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Introduction

There has been little discussion on the origins of commercialism in sport. The major periodisation debate in sports history has been around the concept of modernisation advanced by Guttman in which he postulated seven systematically related features inherent to modern sport: secularism, equality, specialisation, rationalisation, bureaucratisation, quantification and the quest for records.¹ Guttman did not specifically label either commercialism or professionalism as one of these seven structural characteristics, though he associated the former with modern sport in the western world and identified the latter as being associated with equality (negatively) and specialisation (positively).²

Sports historians generally accept that ‘modern’ sport and commercial activity were certainly intertwined from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Mass gate-money spectator sport became a success story with the formation of leagues worldwide and, at the participation level, some sport goods manufacturers became global suppliers. But what of earlier time periods, of eras which have not been scrutinised so thoroughly by an academic discipline (too) focused on modern sport? This question was prompted by the author’s recent experience as a general editor of a six-volume *Cultural History of Sport* published this year by Bloomsbury. Reading chapters on sport in Classical Greece and Rome, in Medieval times, during the Renaissance and in the Age of Enlightenment – none of them written by an economic historian – revealed scattered references to commercial activities associated with playing and watching sport. The authors saw no special significance in reporting the existence of a relationship between sport and commerce, but, to my mind, it has serious implications. First, a long-run involvement of sport with commerce may undermine the view that the modern influx of money into sport has changed the character of sport as it used to be played. Moreover, if it shows that sport was a common exchange commodity well before industrialisation, there will be implications for economic history, not just sports history.

This stimulated me to undertake a long-period analysis, using the output of reputable scholars, to ascertain whether sports commercialisation existed in any real sense in earlier times. I stress that this is not a piece of original research but one that draws on the scholarship of others (and from a

1 Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1978) [Second edition 2004].

2 Guttman, *Ritual*, 31-2, 39, 62, 73.

limited range of English language sources) to make an original argument, hopefully one that will be tested by researchers more competent than me in pre-modern history. This article outlines preliminary findings on sport commercialisation in Ancient Greece and Rome, Byzantium and Medieval and Renaissance Europe. I welcome comments, criticisms and suggestions.

Looking for the existence of early sports commercialism necessitates an operational definition of the concept. For the purposes of this paper, initially sport will be considered to have had a commercial aspect if any of the following are featured.

1. An element of commodification in which someone was willing to pay to play or watch sport. Vamplew suggests that this occurs in three distinct areas: player sports products which embrace equipment, costume, clubs, facilities and coaching; spectator sports products covering the game itself and the venue where it was played; and associated sports products which are goods and services that have been allied with sport in some way but that are not really necessary to the playing or watching of sport, though they can heighten the enjoyment, as with catering and branded merchandise.³
2. The employment of professional sportspersons, talented performers paid to entertain an audience, act as vehicles for gamblers, compete for prizemoney, and earn fees for coaching less-skilled athletes.
3. The promotion of sports events to stimulate economic activity in a particular locality by attracting visitors to the area along with the spending involved in constructing facilities and putting on the show.

Greece, Rome, and Byzantium

Commercialisation of spectator sport need not involve the selling of tickets. The thousands of spectators who flocked to the Colosseum in Rome in the first century CE to watch a day of gladiatorial combat – in the morning men hunting and slaughtering wild animals and in the afternoon men with sword and shield against opponents perhaps with net and trident, the two sessions punctuated by the mid-day execution of criminals – were not paying for

3 Wray Vamplew, 'Products, Promotion, and (Possibly) Profits: Sports Entrepreneurship Revisited', *Journal of Sport History* 45.2 (2018), 184-187; Wray Vamplew, 'The Commodification of Sport: Exploring the Nature of the Sports Product', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 35.7/8 (2018), 659-672.

their pleasure. This day of thrills and deaths would have been funded by a patron. Roman sporting events, like the Greek ones that had preceded them, were virtually always communal occasions with funding provided often by priests who were required or expected to present gladiatorial performances, or by a wealthy donor hoping to build good will with the community, so charging for entry was contrary to purpose.⁴ Indeed, in many cases sporting events were combined with ‘give-aways’ of various kinds such as feasts for all comers. The men who vied for consulships and other elected offices needed to win the favour of voters, and accepted ways of doing this included the sponsorship of games. Given there was no pricing system, segregation was maintained by law with sections of amphitheatres reserved for different categories of socio-economic status. Senators and other high-ranking individuals received preferential seating at the front of the stands, thus not only gaining an unimpeded view of the action but also putting them on display before the rest of the crowd. When power became more centralised in the Emperor, sponsorship became his prerogative (at least within Rome) and, set apart in special box seating in the Colosseum, the emperor demonstrated his power over life and death by granting or denying life to defeated gladiators, and, at the same time presented himself to his subjects.⁵

The profit-makers in all this were gladiatorial managers who ran establishments of fighters and hired them out to promoters organizing combats. They paid a hiring fee which was between 10% and 20% of the gladiator’s value, but had to pay the full cost if he was killed or seriously wounded. The gladiatorial managers insisted on sureties for this eventuality and a system developed of the promoters using financial middlemen who, presumably for a fee, would offer credit facilities sufficient to cover such mishaps. Thanks to an imperial imposition of price control in 177 CE we know that gladiators at that time were valued at between 3,000 sesterces and 15,000 sesterces, depending upon their rank. The hierarchy was determined by the gladiator managers who had an obvious incentive to inflate the grades, but against that, if the fighters did not perform at the expected level, the reputation of the stable would suffer with consequent deleterious market effects. Additionally, by law, the promotions required gladiators from all ranks to be supplied so the managers needed a portfolio of combatants of varying skills and

4 M. Carter, ‘Gladiatorial Ranking and the *SC de Pretiis Gladiatorum Minuendis*’ in Thomas F. Scanlon (ed.), *Sport in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014), volume 2, 229-268.

5 Paul Christesen and Rose MacLean, ‘The Purpose of Sport’ in Paul Christesen and Charles Stokking (eds.), *A Cultural History of Sport in Antiquity* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 38.

qualities.⁶ It has been alleged that some of the gladiatorial managers actually put on their own shows with paid admission, but this appears to have been due to a mistranslation.⁷ What a pity as that would have revolutionized our thinking on early entrepreneurship!

The gladiators were highly-trained, skilled, professional sportsmen. With few exceptions, they were not free citizens, but rather condemned criminals, prisoners-of-war, slaves, or freeborn men who had sold themselves to pay debts. There was a career structure based on a system of ranking and a tyro, if successful, could work up four ranked grades to become valued at 15,000 sesterces. As well as being housed and fed by the stable manager, win or lose they were entitled to 20% of their hiring fee as a wage, often obtained a share of any prize money awarded, and could also receive presents from fans or gamblers, with the ultimate gift being their freedom. Some freed gladiators continued to fight, negotiating their terms directly with the promoters.⁸ On the basis of some sweeping assumptions and a conflation of gladiatorial experiences of 177 CE with wage information for 301 CE, a middle-ranked gladiator earned perhaps 2,000 sesterces for a bout, equating to roughly 14 days wages for an unskilled labourer, though, as far as we are aware, the gladiator had few living costs to cover.⁹ Less gladiators were killed than has been commonly supposed and a few exceptional characters fought over fifty times, though most top-ranked gladiators participated in less than twenty combats. Taking as many as twenty bouts as a norm and applying the highest hiring rate available, career earnings come to just 60,000 sesterces, less than two year's wages for an unskilled worker, scant reward for risking life and limb, but sufficient perhaps to buy freedom if that was an objective.

Whether these figures prove meaningful or not, there is no doubt that gladiators were full-time professionals. Yet they were not the first professional sportsmen about which we have detail. They had been preceded, for one, by the Ancient Greeks. Many winners in the equestrian events at the 'crown' events [where, eventually but not initially, prestige rather than money was at stake and the sole award was a crown made from leaves] at Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, and Isthmia did not pilot their own chariots to

6 Carter, 'Gladiatorial Rankings', 245-262.

7 Carter, 'Gladiatorial Rankings', 267-268.

8 M.J. Carter, 'Gladiatorial Combat: The Rules of Engagement', *Classical Journal* 102.2 (2006), 97-114.

9 Robert C. Allen, 'How Prosperous Were the Romans? Evidence from Diocletian's Price Edict (301 AD)', *Department of Economics Discussion Paper* 363, October 2007, University of Oxford.

victory but hired skilled drivers for that task.¹⁰ Clearly such sportsmen were professionals, but the prevailing view today, based on the pioneering work of Young, is that all Greek elite performers (athletes, wrestlers and charioteers) were professional.¹¹ This was not in the sense of sport being their full-time occupation on which they relied for income, but in that they competed for prizes, some of which could be valuable. Using assumptions which minimized the value (such as the lowest price of oil and the highest wage rate), Young calculated that the 100 amphoras awarded to the victor in the footrace at the Panathenaic Games in Classical Greece was the equivalent of 847 days wages for a skilled craftsman of the time and could have bought half-a-dozen slaves or possibly a house.¹² Better than being a gladiator: and less risky! Not all prizes were at that level. Lesser ones might be an ox-hide or an animal that could be sacrificed. Yet, especially when we move forward into the Hellenistic period, some were even more valuable and all of them were tax-free. Some professionals were full-time and hired private trainers to improve their skills and preserve their bodies.¹³ There were enough festivals available for freelance professionals to undertake tours in which they combined a number of local games with one of the more significant, and possibly highly lucrative, events. Some cities even paid appearance money to attract star performers to their festivals.¹⁴ Evidence indicates that both individuals, and especially states, would sponsor or subsidise talented athletes and, in the case of the more successful, who brought renown to their city, offer public pensions after they retired from competitive sport.¹⁵ Addi-

10 Christian Mann and Sebastian Scharff, 'Horse Races and Chariot Races in Ancient Greece: Struggling for Eternal Glory', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 37.3/4 (2020), 167.

11 David Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletes* (Ares: Chicago, 1984); David C. Young, 'Professionalism in Archaic and Classical Greek Athletics', in Thomas F. Scanlon (ed.), *Sport in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014), volume 2, addendum, 92-94. Young believes that earlier authors who argued that Greek athletes were amateurs were trying to legitimize contemporary amateurism (based on class rather than economics) by claiming that its proponents were 're-inventing' a concept from Antiquity. In contrast Young (*Olympic Myth*, 7) found no evidence that the concept of 'amateurism' was ever known in antiquity and indeed that 'amateur' was one thing for which the Greeks never even had a word.

12 Young, 'Professionalism', 84-87.

13 Christian Mann, 'Products, Training and Technology' in Christesen and Stocking (eds.), *A Cultural History of Sport in Antiquity*, 74.

14 Sophie Remijsen, 'The End of the Ancient Olympics and Other Contests: Why the Agonistic Circuit Collapsed in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 135 (2015), 153.

15 Nigel B. Crowther, 'Athlete and State: Qualifying for the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece', *Journal of Sport History* 23.1 (1996), 34-43; Stephen Brunet, 'Olympic Hopes from Ephesos', *Journal of Sport History* 30.2 (2005), 219-235; Young, 'Profession-

tionally, so keen were some states to gain victories, that they persuaded star performers to change their citizenship with offers too good to refuse except by the most loyal.¹⁶ Roman charioteers also changed allegiances when the money was right.¹⁷

Greek athletic festivals were promoted by their city hosts to strengthen the community, to outdo rival cities, and to boost the local economy. Ultimately, they bore the costs but they looked to local sponsors for funding, men who sought social capital and political influence.¹⁸ This continued into the period of the Roman empire: indeed Remijsen has argued that the number of athletic contests increased during the early imperial period. They survived the hyperinflation of the late third and early fourth centuries CE which eroded the capital value of the assets backing the games and increased the costs of operating them, before falling victim in the fourth and fifth centuries to the growing centralisation and costs of imperial political administration. Cities found their power to act independently was reduced, which, combined with tightened controls over their spending, meant festival funding became more risky. Moreover, they could no longer rely on local benefactors whose political sights were now set on provincial rather than city influence or leadership. As individual festivals were abandoned, a domino principle kicked in and full circuits of events collapsed when it became less viable for athletes to attend a reduced number of gatherings. By 400 CE only a handful of contests survived, the majority of them in provincial capitals and dependent on the willingness of competitors to travel to each of them consecutively. The situation was fragile and, as with the minor regional circuits, this international circuit too collapsed once a few individual festivals ran into financial difficulties.¹⁹

Although, as far as we know, the many stadia throughout the Ancient Greek world were not built specifically to attract sporting tourists, their capacity was greater than the local populace could fill. That at Delphi held 7,000; the one at Isthmia had its capacity raised from 4,000 to 21,000; and that at Olympia from 24,000 to 40,000, the same capacity as Nemea.²⁰ The

alism', 82-91; Zinon Papakonstantinou, 'Conflict and Accommodation' in Christesen and Stocking (eds.), *A Cultural History of Sport in Antiquity*, 128.

16 Crowther, 'Athlete and the State', 34-35.

17 Sinclair Bell, 'Horse Racing in Imperial Rome: Athletic Competition, Equine Performance, and Urban Spectacle', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 37.3/4 (2020), 199.

18 Remijsen, 'End of the Ancient Olympics', 150-151.

19 Remijsen, 'End of the Ancient Olympics' 155-164.

20 Nigel Crowther, 'Visiting the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece: Travel and Conditions for Athletes and Spectators', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 18.4 (2001),

sports held at these stadiums, plus that at Nemea, became centres of sports tourism, attracting visitors from far afield.²¹ We do not know whether these spectators paid an entry fee: the debate is inconclusive, though leaning towards free admission.²² One suggestion is that entry fees may have applied to foreigners because they did not participate in a city's institutions and thus could not bestow honour or votes on the patrons of the games.²³ However, they had to be housed and fed which provided opportunities for profit-seeking traders to establish tent cities and food supply lines. Others also saw possible economic benefit including fortune-tellers, pimps with their women, entertainers such as acrobats and jugglers, and hawkers of merchandise.²⁴

Another economic aspect of Greek and Roman sport can be seen in horseracing. Equestrian events were a regular component of athletic competitions in the ancient world, mostly chariot racing but with some ridden races. They featured in the Olympics and other major games as well as at regional and local events. However, participation was the prerogative of the elite. Only those with substantial disposable income could afford to own racehorses as horse breeding and racing were expensive, time-consuming pursuits that held little chance of financial reward. Willekes argues that the racehorse was the ultimate symbol of conspicuous consumption: its sole function was to win races and provide greater prestige for its owner.²⁵ In Antiquity owners of horses were rarely active participants, but certainly in Classical Greece they took all the kudos rather than the jockeys and charioteers who were slaves or hired professionals about whom we know very little. This changed in Roman times when chariot racing became systematically professionalised. Staging the chariot races was the responsibility of four racing teams, factions identified by their colours of blue, green, red and white. They began as independent contractors but became controlled by the emperor himself in the later years of the empire. From the faction leader and team manager to charioteers, apprentices, veterinarians, farriers, grooms, cobblers, and more, the factions were self-contained entities that dealt with every aspect of preparing a team of horses for the track: they

37-42; Donald G. Kyle, 'Ancient Greek and Roman Sport' in Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2017), 85.

21 Fernando Garcia Romera, 'Sports Tourism in Ancient Greece', *Journal of Sports Tourism History* 5.2 (2013), 146-160.

22 Romera, 'Sports Tourism', 159.

23 Mann, 'Products, Training and Technology', 93.

24 Romera, 'Sports Tourism', 153.

25 Carolyn Willekes, 'Breeding Success: The Creation of the Racehorse in Antiquity', *Museion*, Series III, 16 (2019), 453-469.

procured the horses, maintained the stables, trained the drivers and provided the chariots.²⁶ Charioteers and their horses became celebrities in their own right, commemorated with monuments and epigrams. In the Greek world the horses, charioteers, and jockeys were a symbol of the owner's prestige; in the Roman world the charioteers and their horses were the public face of a sports business. Charioteers were almost exclusively low born, but, as with gladiators, those who were slaves could earn their freedom by their success as performers and all drivers who survived the dangers of the race-track could do well financially out of the prizemoney that they won. A prime example was the Spanish charioteer Diocles who, during a 24-year career won 1,462 of his 4,257 races and accumulated over 35 million sesteres.²⁷ The number of horses required was substantial as in the heyday of the Roman circus there were perhaps 66 days of racing, on average each with 24 races for either two-horse or four-horse chariots with up to 12 competitors in each race. The number of horses required for a single day of racing was somewhere between 576 (12 two-horse chariots in 24 races) and 1,152 (12 four-horse chariots in 24 races): and this was at just one track. This can be put in perspective by noting that a single racehorse might cost around 1,200 drachmas, sufficient to buy nearly 10,000 days of unskilled labour or a flock of over 1,000 sheep.²⁸ Real conspicuous consumption! This was similar to the Greek horse owners who, despite prizes being on offer, had to spend substantial sums to breed, train and transport their animals which suggests that they were more concerned with gaining prestige and immortal fame than making money.²⁹

Early hippodromes used for horse and chariot racing in Ancient Greece were often just flat, cleared terrain with turning posts to guide the riders and drivers with ropes to keep the spectators away from the racing surface.³⁰ Roman circuses were a different matter, being huge arenas with seating for thousands of spectators – the Circus Maximus in Rome accommodated at least 150,000 – and there were dozens of them throughout the Roman empire, a significant investment for sporting purposes.³¹

An associated sports product that must be mentioned is gambling for it and sport are ideal partners: gambling can add to the excitement of a sports

26 Bell, 'Horse Racing in Imperial Rome', 191-192.

27 Bell, 'Horse Racing in Imperial Rome', 201.

28 Young, 'Professionalism', 86; Michael Vickers, 'Golden Greece: Relative Values, Minae, and Temple Inventories', *American Journal of Archaeology* 94. 4 (1990), 613-625.

29 Mann and Scharff, 'Horse Races and Chariot Races', 166.

30 Mann and Schraff, 'Horse Races and Chariot Races', 168.

31 Bell, 'Horse Racing in Imperial Rome', 185-186.

event and the unpredictability of sport is attractive to gamblers. The Greeks were avid gamblers, often by throwing dice or the knucklebones of sheep and goats, but there is little evidence of them gambling on sport itself, apart from odd references to betting associated with cockfights, quail-fights and quail-baiting which appeared as peripheral activities at the gymnasia and some official festivals.³² In the absence of available evidence it cannot be argued that there was sports gambling associated with the organised Greek games or hippodrome races. One authority believes that, given the competitiveness of Greek sport and the other gambling that has been identified, there must have been betting on sport, but that no one has made a sustained effort to find it. He noted that excavations in the stadium at Nemea have turned up numerous small coins from a number of cities which may have reflected betting among the spectators.³³ For harder information (from tombs and court cases) on such betting at the chariot races we have to await the Romans. Here there is acknowledgement of ‘ceaseless betting’ on the chariot races but no specific study of it.³⁴ Toner’s chapter on gambling notes contemporary comments on the pervasiveness of racing-talk and betting and that in everyday conversation, chariot races and gladiatorial fights were all the rage and in the days preceding the festival, talk turned on nothing but bets.³⁵

Moving into the Byzantine era, the emperors dropped the Roman gladiatorial contents and brutal animal sports but continued the tradition of chariot racing. One of the first projects that Emperor Constantine undertook was to finish construction of the Great Hippodrome in Constantinople, the largest building in the city, capable of seating over 100,000 spectators.³⁶ Later emperors saw political wisdom in defraying the operating costs of this venture and over fifty others throughout the empire, expenses which included the salaries of the charioteers, their assignment and reassignment to the factions, the training of horses, the construction of chariots, interval entertain-

32 Stephen E. Kidd, ‘How to Gamble in Greek’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 137 (2017), 119-134; Nick Fisher, ‘The Perils of Pittakos: Settings of Cock Fighting and Dicing in Classical Athens’ in B. Bell and G. Davies (eds.) *Games and Festivals in Classical Antiquity* (Archaeopress: Oxford, 2004), 69-71. I am grateful to Paul Christesen for these references.

33 Personal email communication from Paul Christesen 10 February 2021.

34 Eve D’Ambra, ‘Racing with Death: Circus Sarcophagi and the Commemoration of Children in Roman Italy’, *Hesperia Supplements* 41 (2007), 341. I am grateful to Sinclair Bell for this reference.

35 Jerry P. Toner, *Leisure and Ancient Rome* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1995) unpaginated copy

36 David Allen Parnell, ‘The Emperor and His People at the Chariot Races in Byzantium’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 57.3/4 (2020), 237.

ment and the feeding of the audience.³⁷ The entire sport became virtually a government enterprise which ultimately led to its decline outside Constantinople when revenue shortages following significant defeats in the Persian War and the Arab invasion in the seventh century CE forced government cutbacks.³⁸

These emperors, like the providers of sporting entertainment in both Ancient Greece and Rome, can be classed as sporting entrepreneurs but ones that did not put the bottom line as their rationale. On the contrary, they laid out expenditure with no expectation that it would be recovered. The costs incurred could be substantial, especially the *munera* with gladiators, splendid armaments, and wild beasts to be fought. One estimate is that across the Roman empire annual expenses for these was between 60 million and 120 million sesteres, even excluding the great imperial games in Rome itself.³⁹ This was spent for political and social reasons, not economic gain. Nevertheless they can be classed as sports entrepreneurs. Elsewhere Vamplew has argued that too much focus has been centred on profit-seeking as the motive of sports entrepreneurs and has suggested that instead the defining characteristic should be on the actual provision of sport and sporting facilities, no matter what the motive. He suggests four categories of entrepreneurial objectives: the seeking of direct income from sport; the seeking of revenue indirectly from sport; the seeking of psychic income or personal or national kudos from sport; and not-for-profit ambitions.⁴⁰ Antiquity sports were not advertised to make a profit for their promoters but to advertise the status of the promoters (or horse owners)

In Ancient Greece and Rome, there is significant information on commercial activity involved with sport, including regularly organised events, large-capacity sports stadiums, sports entrepreneurship, professional athletes with trainers and free agency, sports tourism, and gambling on sport. Add to this a virtual nationalised racing industry in Byzantium via state-sponsorship, and the evidence of an early connection between sport and commerce seems compelling.

37 Sotiris G. Giatsis, 'The Organisation of Chariot Racing in the Great Hippodrome of Byzantine Constantinople', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 17.1 (2000), 37, 51; Parnell, 'The Emperor and His People', 234-237.

38 Parnell, 'The Emperor and His People', 233-245.

39 Mann, 'Products, Training and Technology', 92.

40 Vamplew. 'Products', 187-198.

Medieval and Renaissance Europe

Although sport in the Renaissance period is well-documented, the medieval period is a darkish age in terms of information for sports historians, but we know that two groups of professional sportsmen developed, tourneying knights and skills tutors. One of the most prevalent images of medieval sport is the knight in armour on horseback ready to engage in jousting, but knights also took part in mock battles (melées and tournaments) in which horses, equipment and men could be captured and held for ransom by the winning side. Some events were large spectacles: that at Lagny-sur-Marne in 1179 had around 10,000 participants, some 3,000 knights and their retinues, the rest fighting mercenaries.⁴¹ Knights themselves were mercenary soldiers so the tournaments enabled them to hone their martial skills when not engaged in actual warfare with the added bonus of making material gains. We know from a contemporary biography of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman knight, William Marshal, that the knights themselves saw tournaments as an opportunity to make money. His skill as a champion tourneyer enabled him to amass wealth, and ascend the aristocratic ladder.⁴² Hence knights can be considered professional sportsmen. By the early fourteenth century the tournament was a well-established sporting fixture in virtually every corner of Europe and one estimate is that a knight could tourney once a fortnight or so.⁴³ Not only could they make money from booty but, additionally, by the latter part of the twelfth century there were judges, often retired senior knights, who selected the best knight of the tournament for a money prize. By the thirteenth century in Italy, and the fifteenth century elsewhere, the judges were also selecting second- and third-place star performers who were also awarded prizes.⁴⁴ With the spread of projectile warfare (longbow volleys, armour-piercing crossbows and, later, firearms) knightly skills became less useful in battle and tournaments became more exhibitions of horsemanship than martial abilities. Over time the knight became transformed into an elegant courtier rather than a professional sportsman.⁴⁵

41 Robert A. Mechikoff, Noel Fallows and Ken Mondschien, 'The Purpose of Sport' in Noel Fallows (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Medieval Age* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 44.

42 Mechikoff et al., 'Purpose of Sport', 45.

43 Noel Fallows, 'Introduction' in Noel Fallows (ed.) *A Cultural History of Sport in the Medieval Age* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 5; Angela Gleason, 'Medieval Sport' in Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2017), 104-105.

44 Fallows, 'Introduction', 5.

45 Fallows. 'Introduction', 6.

In fourteenth century Europe knightly tournaments became widely publicised and often lavish spectacles with spectators attending specifically for the show, some of whom had travelled considerable distances to attend. In 1389 a month-long tournament in France tempted a significant number of Englishmen to cross the channel solely for the purpose of watching. In many other cases the number of spectators necessitated the erection of grandstands and the fencing off of areas to accommodate them. By the mid fifteenth century, short-term sports tourism was a common phenomenon in Europe and towns offered to provide horses and a banquet for the participants and organisers in order to gain the profit derived from visitors.⁴⁶ No one paid to watch the tournaments but towns vied to host them because of the associated consumer spending of thousands of spectators who flocked to see the tourneying knights. Others who took advantage of the commercial opportunities included vendors of a variety of merchandise, livestock sellers and horse traders, land agents, moneychangers, freelance blacksmiths, bonesetters, pickpockets and prostitutes.⁴⁷ No one has yet challenged Young's assertion made over three decades ago that the English court in Tudor and early Stuart spent more on tournaments than on any other form of entertainment.⁴⁸ These English tournaments embodied role-playing theatricals along with the actual martial exercise and served as politico-economic events which consolidated the power of the monarchs, enhanced their reputations abroad, and confirmed the social hierarchy. Thousands of commoners could be in attendance, accommodated in their own spectator areas separated from the lavish royal viewing stands. As in Rome and Greece they did not pay for their entertainment as this was financed by the crown and nobility as 'prestige propaganda'.⁴⁹ However, Young suggests that gate-money – a shilling a head is cited – was introduced under Elizabeth.⁵⁰

Jousting emerged as a separate sport from tournaments. Views on jousting have been revised in recent years. It is now accepted that, although violent, it was less dangerous than previously supposed. Deaths were relatively uncommon but were highlighted by contemporary chroniclers and the knights

46 John McClelland, 'The Accidental Sports Tourist: Travelling and Spectating in Medieval and Renaissance Europe', *Journal of Tourism History* 5.2 (2013), 162-3.

47 Mechikoff, et al., 'The Purpose of Sport', 47; Michael Harney, 'Conflict and Accommodation' in Noel Fallows (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Medieval Age* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 157; Gleason, 'Medieval Sport', 108.

48 Alan R. Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* (George Philip: London, 1987), 7. I am grateful to Jonathan Duke-Edwards for this reference.

49 Alan R. Young, 'Tudor Arthurianism and the Earl of Cumberland's Tournament Pageants', *Dalhousie Review* 67.2-3 (1988), 176-189; Young, *Tournaments*, 73-74.

50 Young, *Tournaments*, 86.

involved emphasised the dangers of the sport so as to glamorise their bravery. Indeed the aim was not to kill or maim one's opponent but to shatter one's lance (made of soft wood so it would do this on impact thus adding to the spectacle) on his shield or armour.⁵¹ The prize, as reward makes its first appearance at the joust, typically consisted of jewellery, a cup or salver. Money itself was never awarded as a prize but the value of the prize is often stated in contemporary sources.⁵² Jousting continued in England till the third decade of the seventeenth century but was abandoned on the continent following the death of Henri II in a joust in 1559.⁵³

In the meantime, another set of professionals had emerged, those who taught sporting skills to private clients. Admittedly senior gladiators had acted as instructors to tyros but that had been an inhouse service obligation. Some of these teaching professionals were also involved in martial skills such as the French fencing masters recorded as early as the thirteenth century.⁵⁴ Others taught non-utilitarian skills in tennis-like ball games such as the salaried resident professionals in the Italian princely courts in the late fifteenth century onwards. There were also freelance players who provided a betting market for their backers and onlookers.⁵⁵ Tennis players also made money by sharing in the winnings of gambling spectators; tennis players, gymnasts, runners, weight-lifters, wrestlers were on the payroll of aristocratic households and displayed their skills for the entertainment of their employers and guests. Target shooters went from competition to competition, sometimes sponsored by their home city for reasons of prestige, to up their position in the hierarchy of European cities.

Throughout the Renaissance professional sportsmen continued to earn money from prizemoney, as with the many northern European knights who travelled to Italian cities to compete in jousting tournaments, or from tutoring in the skills of fencing and tennis to the upper and aspirant echelons of society.⁵⁶ Performances by students and their teachers were sometimes put on for a paying public: it cost two denarii to watch sword and dagger fights in 1580 in Augsburg.⁵⁷ By the end of the sixteenth century such

51 Fallows, 'Introduction', 29.

52 Fallows, 'Introduction', 15.

53 Fallows, 'Introduction', 6.

54 Mechikoff et al., 'The Purpose of Sport', 43

55 Fallows, 'Introduction', 12.

56 John McClelland, 'Introduction: "Sport" in Early Modern Europe' in John McClelland and Brian Merrilees (eds.), *Sport and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, Toronto: 2009), 31.

57 Élisabeth Belmas, 'Products, Training and Technology' in Alessandro Arcangeli (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Renaissance* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 80.

privately organised competitive exhibitions were being regulated as public entertainments by the City of London.⁵⁸ These spectator events were usually small-scale ventures but occasionally were much larger as when the Company of the Masters of Defence attracted a crowd of some 4,000 in late sixteenth-century London.⁵⁹

Significant, but non-paying, crowds were attracted to the sporting competitions organised, sponsored or subsidised by town councils across many parts of Europe.⁶⁰ Such events included tournaments, shooting contests and horse races, all of which frequently attracted thousands of spectators.⁶¹ Some of the spectators came to see local talented athletes pitted against representatives of neighbouring towns. This could be another source of income for such sportspersons, in terms of expenses and sustenance if not in direct payment for their services. In the German city of Augsburg societies of arbalists, archers and musketeers each had their own training area and shooting ranges and participated in armed combats to demonstrate their courage, test the city's defensive capabilities, and entertain spectators. The council of Augsburg also established an archery festival, funded by a lottery and open to competitors from neighbouring cities, which also featured competitions for jumping, stone-throwing, boules and horseracing.⁶² Many publicly organised sports events were held in urban environments, often in the market square of the towns, though temporary infrastructure in the form of viewing stands and seating might be erected for tournaments and shooting competitions in the market square.⁶³ In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Italian and German cities both featured urban horseracing, organised by city governments on an annual basis, the former usually on the city's patron saint's day and the latter often associated with trade fairs. There was an emphasis on attracting spectators – some in temporary grandstands erected especially for the events – so that the city would benefit from consumer spending and taxation.⁶⁴

58 Diane Roussel, 'Conflict and Accommodation' in Alessandro Arcangeli (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Renaissance* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 115.

59 Christian Jaser, 'Rules and Order' in Alessandro Arcangeli (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Renaissance* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 99.

60 Roussel, 'Conflict and Accommodation', 115.

61 Jaser, 'Rules and Order', 93-94.

62 Belmas, 'Products, Training and Technology', 80.

63 Angela Schattner, 'Sporting Time and Sporting Space' in Alessandro Arcangeli (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Renaissance* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 54-54.

64 Christian Jaser, 'Urban *Palio* and *Scharlach* Races in Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth-Century Italy and Germany', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 37.3/4 (2020), 272-287.

Others making money out of sport included equipment manufacturers. These existed in Antiquity to arm the Gladiators, build the racing chariots, and use leather for javelin thongs and boxing gloves.⁶⁵ There would have been no medieval tournaments and jousting without the armourers whose products were vital for a knight's performance as they affected his mobility, endurance and safety.⁶⁶ By the Renaissance a sports equipment industry was 'flourishing'.⁶⁷ Initially, as with the armourers, those who traded in martial equipment simply found another market for their weapons with the archers, swordsmen and arquebusiers. Others too sought supplementary income sources, such as woodturners added balls and bats to their customary lines of furniture legs and shoe heels. However there were also craftsmen who produced equipment specifically for sporting purposes: by the sixteenth century there were forty tennis-ball manufactories in Paris alone and such was the quality of French tennis balls that they were exported to neighbouring countries.⁶⁸

The Renaissance also witnessed an expansion in the construction of sports facilities for commercial gain. Recreational sport had long occupied both public and private space on a temporary basis, often using town squares and castle courtyards for jousting or tilting, the streets for ball games, and gardens alongside public houses for skittles and cudgelling. However from the fifteenth century a process emerged of permanently identifying space for recreational sport with a greater emphasis on the private sector and the payment of fees to play (and sometimes to watch).⁶⁹ In France, privately-owned, enclosed pétanque pitches became so popular that in 1630 Louis XIII authorised the construction for business purposes of a further 1,500. Looking at just two capital cities, by the end of the sixteenth century Paris had 250 indoor tennis courts operating on a pay-and-play basis which provided a livelihood for an estimated 7,000 citizens and in London by 1617 there were 31 skittle alleys and 14 tennis courts.⁷⁰

65 Mann, 'Products, Training and Technology', 83-91.

66 Gregory Malszecki, 'The Armoured Body: Knightly Training and Techniques for Combative Sports in the High Middle Ages' in John McClelland and Brian Merrilees (eds.), *Sport and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, Toronto: 2009), 115-125.

67 John McClelland, 'Redefining the Limits: Sport in the Age of Galileo and the Scientific Revolution', *European Studies in Sport History* 8 (2015), 26-27.

68 Belmas, 'Products, Training and Technology', 65.

69 Belmas, 'Products, Training and Technology', 68.

70 Belmas, 'Products, Training and Technology', 69-72.

Gambling became a major driving force behind sport in the Enlightenment period, but this had been foreshadowed in Renaissance Europe.⁷¹ Betting was a prime mover behind the organisation of real tennis, perhaps the most popular sport of the period. A betting culture developed around the game from the conspicuous wagers of the nobility to the small stake bets at the Parisian tennis courts.⁷² Gillmeister argues that the fifteen point scoring system was related to coinage and monetary stakes.⁷³

Discussion

This paper has not been concerned with the modernisation of sport (except in that it usually embraced greater commercialisation) but with whether sport exhibited aspects of commercialisation (as defined earlier) before modern sport existed. To put it another way commercialisation in sport did not infer modernisation of sport. Although some researchers would shift the beginnings of modernisation back to the early modern period, none have claimed Ancient Greece, Rome or even Medieval Europe as its birthplace.⁷⁴ Yet clearly the games and tournaments of those times were associated with both commercialism and professionalism. Perhaps this should not be surprising as once an economy embraces monetisation and money exchange, commercialisation is likely in many activities including sport. However, the early focus was on paying professionals and selling associated products to a sports audience rather than asking those spectators to pay an admission fee for the right to view sport. Although there were a few precursors, gate-money sport really began to develop as a capitalist enterprise in the Enlightenment era as more people, especially in urban areas, found the wherewithal to

71 Mike Huggins, 'Associativity, Gambling and the Rise of Protomodern British Sport, 1660-1800', *Journal of Sport History* 47.1 (2020), 1-17; Mike Huggins, 'The Purpose of Sport' in Rebekka von Mallinckordt (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Enlightenment* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 41; Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, 'Introduction' in Rebekka von Mallinckordt (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Enlightenment* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 19.

72 Alessandro Arcangeli, 'The Purpose of Sport' in Alessandro Arcangeli (ed.), *A Cultural History of Sport in the Renaissance* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021), 31; Jaser, 'Rules and Order', 104; Roussel, 'Conflict and Accommodation', 123.

73 Heiner Gillmeister, *Tennis: A Cultural History* (Leicester University Press: London, 1997), 124.

74 Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young, 'Towards a New History of European Sport', *European Review* 19 (2011), 487-507; W. Behringer, 'Arena and Pall Mall: Sport in the Early Modern Period', *German History* (2009) 27.3, 331-357.

pay for their sporting pleasure. Once pay-to-view became more established, capitalist competition made innovation an imperative for securing private economic gain. A criticism that was made at a seminar was that I was asking the wrong question. It was suggested that I focused too much on money flows – prizes, wages and wagers, facility construction, equipment provision, and consumer spending – and ignored the role of capitalism in developing sport. Clearly modern sport is integrated into the capitalist world of private property and the profit motive, but I suspect that some of my critics have conflated capitalism with gate-money spectator sport and have failed to acknowledge that the profit motive was there in Antiquity and Medieval sport and exhibited by those who supplied equipment or participated as professionals.

I haven't yet traced examples of all the aspects of commercialisation for each era, but nevertheless I propose that this does not mean that sport was not commercialised at that time. A historical model of sporting commercialisation within a country could be developed, identifying the degree of commercialisation not merely its existence, or the model might be applied to single sports within a country. This could possibly be along the lines of

1. no commercial activity associated with sport
2. low levels of commercial activity associated with sport
3. moderate levels of commercial activity associated with sport
4. high levels of commercial activity associated with sport

The level of commercialism might then be premised on the number of elements present from an list expanded from the initial proposition to include:

- Sports clubs with fees or subscriptions to be paid
- Commercially-produced sports equipment [One big difference may have been that grassroots sport (about which we need to know a lot more) probably did not supply a market for sports equipment manufacturers as they certainly do today]
- Commercially produced sports costumes
- Sports facilities either rented for use or owned by participants
- Paid sports coaches
- Professional sportspeople
- Paid admission by some spectators (price discrimination for exclusivity or preferential treatment)
- General paid admission

- Organised associated gambling
- Organised advertising
- Associated sales of food and alcohol
- Sponsorship of events or athletes
- The promotion of sports events to stimulate economic activity

It may be that the information currently available does not allow this to be implemented on a nation-wide basis, but it might be done for individual sports within different time periods, which is a task I have set myself to do next.

This model allows for different levels of commercialisation. I deliberately use the word ‘level’ rather than stages as the latter infers a series of steps of progression whereas I see commercialisation as something existing at a point in time with no necessary links forwards or backwards in time. Any historical cross slice can stand alone to demonstrate commercialisation in sport or lack of it. This is in contradistinction to Guttmann’s theory of modernisation of sport. Guttmann accepted that five of his seven criteria fitted sport in Antiquity, though not quantification or the obsession with records, though he is unwilling to describe the era as approaching modernisation. His theory is one of ‘all or nothing’. This is because he believes that his seven factors are systematically interrelated and all had to be present before modernisation could be proclaimed. Moreover they had all disappeared by Medieval times, so partial modernisation was not enough to kick on into full modernisation.⁷⁵

This does not apply to an application of a model of commercialisation. As far as can be ascertained sufficient facets of the model that identify commercialisation in sport were there in Antiquity and were still there in Medieval Europe, though, *and this is important*, they then existed in a different form as sport itself had changed. Gladiatorial games had been replaced by tournaments as the main spectator sport and gladiators had given way to knights as the professional protagonists in combat for entertainment. Whether there were any continuations or adaptations of older ideas in other transition stages needs further research, but each era decides its own scenario (with the caveat that people at the time may not have been fully aware of any new periodisation). The Romans had continued to hold the Olympics and other games in what had become part of their own empire; Byzantium had dropped gladiatorial combat but retained chariot racing. The Ottomans later

⁷⁵ Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record*, 54.

switched to long-distance endurance races rather than chariots circling inside a stadium.⁷⁶

Sport had changed: there was no necessary continuity, no need to borrow ideas from earlier periods. This does not matter to the argument as the concept of commercialisation in sport does not require a continuum, merely the existence of the elements of the model proposed. Moreover, unlike Guttmann, I am not arguing for any necessary interrelationship between the elements; for them just to be present is sufficient.

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76 Tülay Artan, 'Horse Racing at the Ottoman Court, 1524-1728', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 37.3/3 (2020), 246-271.