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To cite this article: Richard Holt (2006) The Amateur Body and the Middle-class Man: Work, Health and Style in Victorian Britain, Sport in History, 26:3, 352-369, DOI: [10.1080/17460260601065953](https://doi.org/10.1080/17460260601065953)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460260601065953>



Published online: 07 Dec 2006.



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The Amateur Body and the Middle-class Man: Work, Health and Style in Victorian Britain

Richard Holt

This article seeks to move the discussion of amateurism beyond the familiar themes of the public school, class distinction and professional corruption. The sporting body is the focus for a discussion of the factors behind the amateur stress on active participation. Amateurism involved more or less strenuous forms of physical exertion by those whose lives increasingly were confined by sedentary office employment. The competitive culture of Victorian work, especially in the City of London, encouraged more systematic forms of sporting contest. Also, poor air quality and new patterns of commuting prompted greater emphasis on outdoor exercise, which was increasingly seen by doctors as beneficial to health. The amateur cult of the active body was further heightened by the widespread Hellenist aesthetic of Victorian society. Hence amateurism was shaped to a greater extent than has been acknowledged by the bodily requirements of work and health as well as by a revived classical ideal of human proportion and beauty.

Amateurism comprised a set of distinctive sporting practices and values, stressing voluntary association, active and ethical participation, and repudiating both professionalism and gambling. Historically, the rise of the amateur has been explained in two ways. It has been understood in social terms as a means of class segregation in sport and, Marxists have added, as a way of imposing 'bourgeois' virtues of competition and patriotism. [1] More influential, however, has been the moral and

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educational explanation. This sees amateurism as an expression of Victorian 'manliness' and 'muscular Christianity'. In particular, amateur sport is held to have grown out of 'the ideology of athleticism', which developed in the public schools in the mid-nineteenth century and spread around the world through a mixture of cultural diffusion and cultural imperialism. [2] According to this account, the public schools and Oxbridge prepared amateur sportsmen to ensure the virility of the 'British race' and the strength of the British Empire. Darwinism, militarism and imperialism shaped an elite masculinity rooted in Anglo-Saxon patriotism, which found its supreme expression in sport.

This approach tends to prioritize what happened abroad over what was going on at home. Amateurism within Britain is inclined to be overlooked or subsumed under the general heading of 'the spread of sport' without much further explanation. Homilies by headmasters, imperial tracts, patriotic doggerel and boys' adventure stories abound as sources for the *intentions* of the few. But what about the *motives* of the many? Why did amateurism get such an enthusiastic reception? Why was it embraced by so many of those who had never been to public school? To stick too rigidly to 'Tom Brown' restricts the scope of enquiry.

Amateurism was many things: a belief in a new kind of vigorous physical culture based on reforming old games and exercises; an organizing principle based on voluntary association and the creation of representative national structures; a written and unwritten code of conduct to promote the competitive principle; and an aesthetic of sport itself. It was a complex phenomenon with complex causes. It arose out of dramatic changes in the conditions as well as the culture of mid-Victorian middle-class life. [3] Of these, three are briefly examined here as a stimulus to further research: firstly, changing patterns of middle-class work; secondly, a shift in attitudes to personal and public health; thirdly, the emergence of a new aesthetic of masculinity which went beyond the familiar idea of 'manliness'. Although amateurism was a national – and an international – phenomenon, the emphasis of this article is English and metropolitan. Research on professional sport has naturally tended to focus on the North. Although amateurism is strongly associated with the South, surprisingly there is no history of the central role of London in the origins of modern sport.

In examining neglected influences, the present inevitably informs the past. Scholars are nowadays urged to reflect critically on the questions they ask. In the 1960s and 1970s Britain broke with its gentlemanly past. Social researchers were acutely aware of this. Amateurism was seen primarily in terms of the role of the public schools as privileged

institutions. Class remains a key factor, but as time passes new questions come to mind. This is an era of intense sports participation among the middle classes. Sport is held to help us work better and to relieve 'executive stress'; sports and health are constantly linked and environmental concerns run deep; finally, celebrity athletes are seen as 'style leaders' and the athletic body is constantly on display. The amateur past was, of course, profoundly different to the commercial present; all the same, asking new questions framed by contemporary issues can illuminate neglected aspects of amateurism as Britain moved from traditional forms of sport to athletic modernity.

Work

The project to link work and leisure, which was a feature of British social history in the 1960s, has not really borne fruit. This at least seems to be true of sport. The sociological view of leisure both as an extension of work and as a compensation for it informed McKibbin's excellent research on hobbies. [4] But work has not figured much in the history of sport except as a backdrop to the working-class spectators at professional football on Saturday afternoons. The nature of labour as a factor in sports participation has been overlooked, especially for the middle classes. Yet amateurism arose precisely at the moment when a more openly competitive work culture took hold of Victorian Britain. Above all, amateurism was a doctrine of active competition. Belief in competition was not the preserve of the Manchester School. As Perkin has argued, the liberal professions embraced similar values and 'armed the new capitalist class with arguments against idle wealth (instead of active capital) and patronage, which they labelled "Old Corruption" (instead of competition and selection by merit, as determined by the market or by competitive examination).' [5] Public service and university education were duly opened up to competitive examination.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century marked the high point of British economic growth. London was the hub of international capitalism based on the triumph of free trade. Even greater changes were soon to come. By 1851 London was the largest city in the world, with a population of around 2.3 million and a further 322,000 living in outer London. By the end of the century London had grown exponentially both in population and in size, sprawling from Barnet in the north to Croydon in the south and beyond. The 1901 census revealed 4,536,000 inhabitants of inner London and 2,050,000 of outer London. The residents of inner London had doubled their numbers but the suburban population had

increased almost sevenfold. Hoppen has ingeniously combined several statistical sources to produce a table of 'the number of males in England and Wales in non-agricultural middle class occupations, 1851–1891'. Professionals and administrators, who played a prominent role in the early government of amateur sport, rose steadily from 183,000 to 289,000. But more spectacular – and central to this discussion – is the vast increase in the numbers of those working in commerce as clerks or other office workers from 121,000 to 514,000. Those described as 'dealers and assistants' saw their numbers rise from 483,00 to 769,000 between 1851 and 1891. Overall the mid-Victorian middle classes made up around 20 per cent of the population. There was a 70 per cent increase in the numbers of those earning over a £150 a year – a fair measure of modest middle-class wealth – using a five-year average from 1848 to 1853 and comparing it with 1868–73. [6]

This was an age of new affluence. It was also a time when a new respect was accorded to those who had made their fortunes in the world by competing in the market place. Samuel Smiles published *Self-Help* in 1859, which he expanded biographically in his three-volume *The Lives of the Engineers* (1862) and completed with works on *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875) and *Duty* (1880). Individuals could – and should – improve themselves not through the patronage of others but by their own will and discipline. 'The 1850s were the right time to make the case for the do-it-yourself self', as Mandler has sharply observed. [7] In a competitive world the critical issue was the attitude of the individual. Obstacles were there to be overcome; no setback need be permanent; the race went to those who stayed the course, and so forth. 'Failure is the best discipline of the true worker, by stimulating him to renewed efforts', as Smiles remarked in the preface to *Self-Help*. [8] It is too easy to see England as the fief of the landed. Martin Wiener has argued strongly for the continued social power of the gentry. But Mandler again puts the other side of the argument with equal force: 'The dominant view of English national character was moulded from the mid-nineteenth century onwards primarily by liberals and radicals who wished to project the English as a model for all nations in a rapidly changing world: egalitarian, self-governing, enterprising and adaptable.' [9]

There is an obvious parallel here with a culture of the body which stressed strenuous participation over mere entertainment. Unstinting effort was more important than the outcome of any given contest. 'Say not, the struggle naught availeth' was the best-known line of the mid-Victorian poet Arthur Hugh Clough. It could just as easily have been the epigraph of the amateur. Few could play well. But that was not important.

The thing was to try as hard as possible. In doing so sportsmen would acquire the qualities required for success in the wider world. The outcome was far less important than the commitment it engendered, whether individual or collective.

Competitive values were by no means confined to the public schools. The gentlemanly culture of British sport hid the underlying ethic of effort and merit which ruled the brave new world of middle-class business. Much was demanded of men in business and the professions. Britain led the world but success came at a price, even for the most privileged. When the 19-year-old son of the Duke of Argyll entered the City, he started at the bottom. His father was briskly reminded the firm 'was no respecter of persons' and his son would get only 'what was due to merit and faithful service'. The bankers Glyn Mills similarly informed the Civil Service Commissioners that 'the state of efficiency at which this establishment has arrived . . . has arisen in the largest degree from every man knowing at the end of the year he will be dealt with according to his merits'. [10] 'Clerks', as Guerriero Wilson has observed in an important study of office life in Victorian Glasgow, 'believed that the economic structure was open and flexible enough to allow them to create their own solitary successful futures . . . through individual hard work'. [11] Hence those lower down the office hierarchy were also affected by the pressure of business. The London Joint Stock Bank introduced the Saturday half-day in 1860 so that 'the great body of clerks, who had now to devote so much continuous labour in the performance of their duties, now have the opportunity . . . of enjoying the fresh air'. [12]

So much for the City as a soft option. For all its apparent civility, 'gentlemanly capitalism' could be a tough business. Mental stress went with the territory. Men had to keep their nerve and concentration, attend to the details of the job and be healthy enough to be able to do it. This applied particularly to younger men who were making their way up the ladder. The idea of a career, of progression through a carefully graded hierarchy on the basis of ability rather than connection, became firmly established in the later nineteenth century. It was precisely these younger members of the middle classes who needed to establish what today would be called 'a work-life balance'. For many – statistics are not available to say how many – football, rugby and hockey in the winter and cricket, tennis and golf in the summer were the way to achieve an equilibrium between work and play.

Despite the pressure of office life, 'the days of heroically long hours lay in the later eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. As the second and third generations came to the fore they relaxed their hours

until they too began to internalize the 9–5 norm'. [13] This left plenty of time for summer exercise on the suburban tennis court, or on the thousand or so golf courses established on the fringes of the big cities between the 1880s and the First World War. One such was Stanmore Golf Club, some ten miles from central London, with a railway station next to the clubhouse. Its membership was mostly drawn from Harrow, Edgware and Stanmore, with a sprinkling from central London and Hampstead. Members were mostly City men, merchants, wharf owners, accountants, commercial solicitors and stockbrokers with a significant minority of those who simply entered 'gentleman' for occupation. Old and new wealth rubbed shoulders. When the club opened its doors in 1893, its new captain, Mr Blackwell (of the food manufacturers Crosse and Blackwell) surveyed the pleasant views looking across to Harrow on the Hill. 'Here', he observed, 'the hard worked man of business may lay aside his everyday worries and anxieties, and meet friends in healthful rivalry and enjoyment.' [14]

It was not only at the ideological and employment levels that changing patterns of middle-class work were important for amateur sport. Although office conditions – then as now – varied greatly according to status and income, this world confined the life of the body in ways and on a scale that were unprecedented. This was the world of the 'great indoors' where men spent their lives sitting at desks. Vastly increased volumes of business meant increasing volumes of paper to be read and replied to; reports had to be written; meetings arranged and so forth. The familiar contours of modern life were taking shape. The effects of this physical immobility were compounded by the advent of the suburban train. The main rail arteries were complete by the 1850s and a frantic programme of suburban and branch connections followed. Sixteen new central London stations opened between 1855 and 1875. In the pre-railway age clerks, in particular, lived in or near the City and walked to work. From the 1860s all this changed. The world's first underground train service, the Metropolitan Railway, was opened in 1863 and the Circle Line was completed in 1884. 'The man on the Clapham omnibus' was not a workman; workers used the new trams. He was a new breed of middle-class commuter, who took horse-drawn buses to come to work. By 1890 the London General Omnibus Company was the largest bus company in the world, with 860 vehicles and 9000 horses. [15]

Those who advocated suburban life thought the trials of commuting were as 'nothing in comparison with being able to sleep in fresh air [and] to have a game of tennis in the summer'. [16] By the 1880s commuters increasingly came from further afield, from the Weald of Kent, the Surrey

Hills and across the Home Counties. Edward Hamilton, for example, 'overheard characteristic remarks proceeding (presumably) from City men' on the morning train from Sevenoaks in 1886. [17] Around 250,000 commuters were coming into central London by train at the end of the century. From London Bridge station 'in thousands they advance, leaning forward in long quick strides . . . swiftly they flash past and still they come and come, like the silent shadowy legions of a dream'. [18]

It was these new conditions that shaped the sporting lives of more affluent young Londoners. Public-school men played a leading role in setting up the Football Association (FA) in 1863, the Rugby Football Union (RFU) in 1871 and the Amateur Athletic Association in 1880. But the rapid growth of these organizations took them beyond the 'old school tie'. The first forms of football or rugby may have originated in a few famous public schools but it was the exigencies of urban life that determined their reception and wider success. The new athletic body was fashioned neither in the countryside nor the inner city itself but between the two: on the green fringes of London; in places such as Barnes or Epping Forest for football; Blackheath, Richmond and Twickenham for rugby; in Surbiton or Teddington for hockey and, of course, at Wimbledon.

This was just as the novelist Charles Kingsley had prophesied in 1857. Best known as a tireless advocate of amateur sport and 'muscular Christianity', Kingsley was also a student of the suburb, predicting 'a complete interpenetration of city and country, a complete fusion of their different modes of life, and a combination of the advantages of both'. [19] Suburban London was the midwife of amateurism and a missing piece in the jigsaw of modern sport. Most provision was private, with banks and large insurance companies leading the way. But 'by 1910 the London County Council alone controlled 113 parks, gardens and open spaces . . . and employed a thousand workers to look after them'. [20] Historians of London, however, have paid little attention to this and historians of sport have been oddly reluctant to attend to material and environmental explanations for the rise of amateurism as opposed to moral or pedagogical ones.

Health

A closely related, though different, way of looking at amateurism is to see it as an aspect of the Victorian obsession with health. 'Public health became a kind of fundamental reform, an underpinning and *sine qua non* for all other reforms', as Anthony Wohl has observed – a view strongly

endorsed in Bruce Haley's pioneering work on sport and health in Victorian culture which has not been properly followed up. [21] Although there has been good research on the role of health and medicine in the specific area of female sport, the triangular relationship between work, health and amateurism has been overlooked when it comes to men. The point here is not that those who promoted amateur ideals or worked as officials consciously advocated sport as part of a public health agenda. That is not the case. It is rather that they themselves could not escape the conditions which gave rise to such widespread public concern and that their attitudes to exercise were inevitably influenced by medical and public opinion.

Much has been made of the sea air in popularizing the seaside holiday. Yet the simple virtues of fresh air tend to be overlooked when it comes to sport. Professional sport did nothing for public health. Tens of thousands of spectators confined together in inner-city spaces and breathing the same polluted air was not the purpose of sport according to the advocates of amateurism. Dickens, the greatest of writers on London, anticipated the later Victorian obsession with fresh air in his famous opening to *Bleak House*: 'Smoke lowering down from the chimney pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full grown snowflakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun.' Even allowing for artistic licence, the London air was seriously polluted; and it stayed that way for the rest of the century. Bad air was no respecter of rank. Windows were small and shut tight, making offices dark and claustrophobic. Reflecting on his time at Barings in the late 1880s, the Harvard-educated J. Walter Wood recalled that 'the general office was a large room with no windows, the ventilation being the high ceiling, where skylights admitted a portion of such light as there happened to be, which on foggy days was none at all'. [22] This could generate a kind of 'cabin fever'. Office life bred the need to get out of the office. 'At noon today there was sunlight on the Surrey hills; the fields and lanes were fragrant with the first breath of spring', wrote George Gissing, the chronicler of Grub Street, 'but of these things Clerkenwell takes no count.' [23] Dickens caught the sombre mood of the Victorian office powerfully in *Dombey and Son*: 'Such vapid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass windows and skylights, leaving black sediment upon the panes, showed the books and papers, and the figures bending over them, enveloped in a studious gloom, and as much abstracted in appearance, from the world without, as if they had been assembled at the bottom of the sea.' [24]

The Select Committee on Smoke Nuisances thought air pollution in the capital had actually got worse in the 1880s and had begun to affect the

outer suburbs. London was colloquially known as 'old smoke'. 'Fresh air is the luxury of the Londoner', wrote *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1842; 'he drinks it up when he can get it.' Anticipating the late Victorian cult of open-air sport, the article went on: 'When you get into the parks, clear of the dusty town . . . your muscle fibre, braced by the current of pure air, becomes endued with unwonted activity.' [25] Monet may have liked to paint the effects of the smoke from thousands of coal fires on the London light. But for those who had to endure it, the desire to escape into the fresh air and move their bodies freely must have been very strong. It is easy to understand why miners took so actively to sport. However, the way environmental and work pressures operated on the office worker, especially in the metropolis, tends to be overlooked.

Given the plethora of new research on the history of medicine and of the body, it is surprising that there has been so little work linking concern for physical and mental health with the rise of amateur sport. This, in fact, was not just a British phenomenon. The young Baron de Coubertin, for example, became a convert to *les sports anglais* in the 1880s. He feared what too much academic and professional work (*surmenage intellectuel*) would do to the cream of French youth. Pressure of work combined with 'the vegetative life' of the office led the Boston moralist Oliver Wendell Holmes to deplore 'the black-coated, stiff jointed, soft muscled, paste complexioned youth in our Atlantic cites'. [26] It was in Britain, however, where the scale of change had been most dramatic, that amateur stress on the vigorous practice of sport was most pronounced.

There were striking changes in medical opinion concerning the beneficial potential of exercise for physical and mental health in the nineteenth century. [27] Earlier generations had been frequently warned of the dangers of pushing the body too far. The guiding principle was that of a quantum of energy; the body had a fixed amount of physical force and endurance which it was dangerous to exceed. This doctrine was effectively overturned in the nineteenth century. Instead of seeing the body as a candle that burned down, physiologists began to conceive it as a machine that worked better with constant use. Claude Bernard and the development of laboratory medicine transformed the study of physiology. 'All functions have as their object the sustaining of life', Bernard wrote, 'and tend constantly to restore the physiological condition when it is disturbed.' [28] It followed that the body was a self-regulating mechanism that needed to be kept in good running order by exercise and diet. It was now medically acceptable for men, especially younger men, to work their bodies hard in sport, to push themselves to the limits, though more gentle exercise such as golf or tennis or recreational cycling was generally

recommended once the first flush of youth had passed. For women, of course, the position was different with medical opinion divided about the dangers of sport for the allegedly more delicate female constitution and reproductive system. That battle was not fully won until the second half of the twentieth century.

The new male body, advocated by doctors and the proponents of amateur sport alike, was a neo-classical norm of human proportion, balancing height, weight, muscle development and mobility. The ideal athlete was neither too tall nor too small, too thin nor too fat. Obesity, in fact, became a particular concern for late-nineteenth-century medicine in Britain and America. Being 'overweight' was both unhealthy and aesthetically undesirable. [29] The 'amateur body' avoided the extremes of physical development that characterized earlier sporting heroes. W.G. Grace, the undisputed hero of late-nineteenth-century English sport, was a big man with a spreading girth in striking contrast to the new, slim, clean-shaven norm. But Grace was the exception who proved the rule, the 'Grand Old Man', a relic of the days of sturdy yeoman farmers and country squires. Grace, of course, despite appearances, was also a doctor and a fanatical believer in the amateur cult of exercise.

Central to the new ideal of the body was the concept of equilibrium, of balance both between the different elements of the human anatomy and the inner and outer self. The healthy individual was not someone who simply avoided illness. Health implied a much wider sense of physical and mental effectiveness. This was the deeper significance of the public school mantra of *mens sana in corpore sano*, a favoured cliché of Victorian headmasters and of sports historians, and yet a phrase that bears re-examination. 'The healthy mind in the healthy body', as Bruce Haley has remarked, 'became a living article of faith to millions ... preached in newspapers, school chapels and consulting rooms of doctors throughout the land.' [30] The point here is not simply the importance of combining physical and mental health but the relationship between the one and the other. Benjamin Brodie, court physician to William IV and president of the Royal Society, put it like this: 'Mental alienation is generally the result of some wrong condition of the body.' [31] A significant body of medical opinion became convinced of the interdependence of body and mind. This logic dictated that exercise was beneficial to mental health. This could be observed even if it could not be properly explained.

Looking at sport from this angle helps to explain the emphasis amateurs laid on active participation and their indifference or hostility to spectator sport. The RFU seems to have almost despised spectators unless they were former players and refused to identify members of

international teams by shirt numbers. Participation in a range of sports was especially prized. Amateurism advocated a multi-sport approach and particularly admired those with a wide range of skills. The Oxford amateur C.B. Fry was famous because he excelled not just in one sport but in many. Alongside diversity, amateurs also prized regularity of exercise. Hence the importance attached to good organization. Before the Victorian era sport was run on a customary and festive basis. This may have been fun but it was not good for fitness. Sport now became a daily or weekly activity rather than an occasional one. Clubs were important here. Men would play more if they played in teams with their friends. Even for individual sports such as running or golf, membership of a club provided a calendar of events that increased the frequency and enjoyment of participation.

A central tenet of amateurism was the regulation of violent play. Traditional sports were held to run an undue risk of injury. Much time was taken up in the 1860s and 1870s with debates about the limits to be placed on dangerous play. Most famously, this concerned the reluctance of those who preferred the handling form of football, which became rugby union, to abandon the right to 'hack' or kick opponents in the shins during a game. This has led to a misleading view that rugby remained a violent sport while football was more civilized. In fact, hacking was banned by the RFU on its foundation in 1871 and only survived in Rugby School itself and a few other older public schools. Rugby union was created partly because the older traditions of the game were seen as incompatible with the needs of those who had to go to the office on Monday morning. [32]

Amateur team sports were robust; it was expected that knocks and bruises were to be borne stoically and brushed aside. But the FA and the RFU were clear that the risk of incurring serious injury arising from a deliberately violent act was completely unacceptable. Accidents and consequent injury could not be avoided from time to time. But the body had to be protected as well as developed. There had to be a clear line between legitimate contact that was 'character building' and violent conduct that was not. Here the post-school dimension of amateur sport is crucial. Rugby – 'manly and healthful' in the new Victorian parlance – soon spread beyond the public schools to the ranks of clerks and young professionals in London and the provinces. For a young man starting out in a lawyer's or stockbroker's office to be seriously incapacitated though unnecessarily dangerous play could be disastrous. The purpose of sport was to enhance health not to undermine it.

Aesthetics

Work and health are two interlinked influences on the emergence of amateur sport, which place the athletic body at the centre of the debate. These factors help to explain the stress amateurs placed on effort and activity. But they do not account for the importance that was attached to the style of the performer and the performance. Amateurism was aesthetic as well as environmental. The amateur sportsman came to stand for the ideal type of new English gentleman. The Victorian era saw the triumph of the well-proportioned athletic body over earlier shapes and sizes of men. Eighteenth-century sporting heroes tended towards the extremes of physical development, from heavily muscled pugilists to diminutive jockeys. Professional sportsmen continued to have specialized bodies and were not necessarily physical models for the rest of humanity. The social elite who pioneered modern sports believed in a neo-classical norm of human proportion, balancing height, weight, muscle development and mobility. Central to this was the idea of equilibrium, both between different elements of the human anatomy and the inner self.

The idealized masculinity associated with the terms 'manliness' and 'muscular Christianity' has an aesthetic as well as a moral connotation. David Alderson, in a provocative literary analysis, has taken this beyond the public-school ideal by invoking the notion of a 'protestant body', strong and beautiful, defined against the allegedly weak and effeminate physique of the Catholic or the political radical. Citing Charles Kingsley's novel about a Chartist tailor, *Alton Locke*, he analyses the moment when the central character abandons his radicalism after watching a Cambridge boat race. These were 'young men who might, if they had chosen, been lounging effeminately about the streets, subjecting themselves voluntarily to intense exertion, for the mere pleasure of toil. The true English stuff came out there ... their strength and activity, so fierce and yet so cultivated.' [33] 'Fierce' competition and a 'cultivated' style, the fusion of old and new values was at the heart of amateur sport.

Literary analysis of a small body of texts is suggestive but the historian is on firmer ground when looking at the influence of neo-Hellenism. The dignity of the ancients had long been a model for the European aristocracy. The Victorians, however, were profoundly impressed by ancient Greece, favouring the Athenian vision of physical and intellectual beauty over the more militaristic Roman body. 'My claim for the study of Hellenism would not be founded on history', wrote the Cambridge classicist J.C. Stobart. 'I would urge some fixed canon in matters of taste, some standard of the beautiful which shall be beyond question or

criticism.' [34] The Greek union of athletic and literary excellence, of physical beauty and mental power was particularly prized. According to the headmaster of Eton, Edmund Warre, 'the Athenians of the fifth century were essentially amateurs, perhaps the most brilliant amateurs the world has seen'. [35] Jowett, the great Oxford classicist and master of Balliol, advised his nephew 'to make yourself a good cricketer [and] football player' as well as a good scholar. [36]

The athletic body became an important subject for the new sculpture of the later nineteenth century. The nineteenth century saw the female nude dominant as a subject over 'the disappearing male'. Leighton's 'Athlete wrestling a python' was one of the most widely admired and reproduced sculptures of the period: 'Various classical themes provided a good excuse for dwelling on the grace and suppleness of the male body.' [37] The Olympic movement encouraged literary and artistic representations of sport in the classical style. Appropriately, the best-known English sportsman of the *fin de siècle* was also a classical scholar. C.B. Fry won a scholarship to Repton from a middle-class family in suburban London and then went to Wadham College, Oxford. He was of medium height and build with an adaptable, perfectly muscled body and posed as an artist's model while an undergraduate. He played cricket for Oxford, Sussex and England, heading the first-class averages at the turn of the century, playing football and rugby for England and equalling the world long-jump record. His image adorned the press. He worked as sports editor for a boys' weekly, *The Captain*, before founding *Fry's Magazine*, which trumpeted the moral and aesthetic virtues of amateur sport. Neville Cardus, who wrote his *Manchester Guardian* obituary in 1956, reproduced in the 1957 *Wisden*, claimed that 'Fry must be counted among the most fully developed and representative Englishmen of his period . . . he belonged – and it was his glory – to an age not obsessed by specialism; he was one of the last of the English tradition of the amateur.' [38]

Photography, too, posed the athlete in the manner of classical portraiture, confident, calm and authoritative, the cricketer holding a bat as a general might rest his hand upon a sword. The heroic tradition of representing the male body was reinvented in sporting iconography just as it was disappearing from fine art. Sport allowed the male body to be openly and beautifully displayed without ambiguous moral connotations. So taking photographs of players coming out to bat or in a commanding pose with a football or an athletic trophy was a feature of the iconography of amateurism. By the early twentieth century such images were common in the press. Ronald ('Ronnie') Poulton-Palmer, the slim, handsome Oxford and England rugby winger killed in the First World War, or Adrian

Stoop of Harlequins set the aesthetic example for a generation. After the First World War professional sportsmen came to be more widely photographed and admired, especially the great professional batsmen such as Jack Hobbs, Herbert Sutcliffe and Frank Woolley. Their upright posture, calm expression and dignified gestures were all taken from the repertoire of the amateur. [39]

Gesture – or, more accurately, the lack of it – is important here. The British had a long tradition of restraint in gesture. As Adam Smith remarked, ‘foreigners observe that there is no nation in the world which uses so little gesticulation as the English’. [40] Amateurism successfully incorporated this habit of restraint into the body language of sport. Displays of emotion were frowned on. Keeping composure in victory or defeat was the mark of the amateur. ‘Displays of anger and passion’ were regarded ‘as characteristics of the socially inferior’ in Edwardian Oxford. [41] The amateur drew on a long-established vocabulary of posture and expression, the batsman walking to the wicket with head high to signify authority and dignity with an expression of gravity or impassivity. The brisk handshake at the end of a game was the accepted gesture; amateurs of the old school would never have embraced, gesticulated, grimaced or stripped in public as players routinely do today.

Clothing was highly significant. Sports clothes were modelled on a casual upper-class style which adopted chivalric forms, crosses and quarters, stripes and hoops, with badges and Latin inscriptions. The Victorian elite was not only fascinated with classical Greece but also with medieval chivalry. [42] The sporting body was inscribed with both influences. This was associated with the wearing of white clothing, a symbol of purity and refinement, for athletics and tennis and – above all – ‘immaculate whites’ for cricket. By the later nineteenth century wearing old or dirty clothes for sport, which had been common earlier, was no longer acceptable. Amateurs espoused a new style of dress, more informal than the ubiquitous dark business suit yet with a studied casual elegance. Flannel trousers with a colourful striped jacket or ‘blazer’ was the standard summer uniform for amateur sport; this became so firmly engrained that amateur officials who stuck to the dress code were later referred to derogatively as the ‘blazerati’. Along with blazers went the club tie and short, neatly parted hair.

Amateurs embraced special sports clothing but rejected specialized physical preparation. Sport was supposed to be a celebration of the natural, unforced qualities of the human body. The earlier champions, especially the pugilists, had developed complex systems of training, followed special diets and taken potions to be sure of winning a contest

and the prize money that went with it. Amateurs abhorred not only the corruption of money but also the corruption of the athletic body, wrenched out of its natural rhythm and forced into extreme patterns of eating, sleeping and exercise. The Corinthians were the most famous team of amateur footballers and G.O. Smith, of Charterhouse and Oxford, was their best player. Smith remarked that 'the Corinthian of my day never trained and I can safely say the need of it was never felt'. [43] B.O. Corbett, another early Corinthian, continued in similar vein. 'The excellence of professional play generally gives the impression that many tricks and intricacies of the game are mastered by mechanical means and laborious training. But the passes of the amateur, though made as often and as accurately, appear to be the result rather of natural instinct.' [44]

Style of play, however, was important. Although cricketers did not train, they were coached and amateurs were expected to have a range of shots that were both elegant and powerful. The 'off drive' was much admired, the batsman sweeping the ball gracefully away through the covers and holding the pose for a moment. Cricket writers endorsed this amateur aesthetic, which reached its apotheosis in the journalism of Neville Cardus for the *Manchester Guardian* between the wars. Archie MacLaren, the amateur captain of Edwardian Lancashire, was a particular favourite of Cardus. So, too, was the son of a Cambridge college servant, Jack Hobbs, who happened to be a professional but played and looked like an amateur: stylish, slim and always smartly dressed. He was the best-known sportsman in England in the 1920s. Hobbs literally embodied the qualities of the gentleman and appropriately was the first professional sportsman to be knighted. Cricket fused English pastoral with an idealized vision of the Englishman as a batsman in what became a thriving genre of cricket writing. [45]

Conclusion

This essay began by suggesting that amateurism has been too narrowly defined by scholars, through their heavy concentration on the role of the public schools. In addition to the moral, social and educational forces that shaped amateurism we have to add the economic, the medical and the aesthetic. Taken as a whole we see a vastly enlarged middle class, its members increasingly confined to the airless office and the sedentary life, taking more active exercise in the interests of their own health and embracing an aesthetic vision of the Englishman as athlete. Material and cultural forces came together in the second half of the nineteenth century to create a new culture of the body, ingeniously fusing together the values

of a striving, enterprising liberal elite with the refined and restrained world of upper-class good manners and style. Amateurism was neither one thing nor the other; it was both; it had its roots equally in the material life of the middle classes and the visual style and patrician virtue of the upper classes. Both elements appealed to the wider Victorian public, without whose active endorsement 'public school' sport would have stayed in the public school.

Notes

- [1] There is no standard account of amateurism; for a defence and some definitions see Lincoln Allison, *Amateurism in sport: An analysis and a defence* (London, 2001); for a good historical survey of class issues, see Norman Baker, 'Whose hegemony? The origins of the amateur ethos in nineteenth-century English Society', *Sport in History*, 24 (1) (2004), pp. 1–15; John Hargreaves, *Sport, power and culture* (Cambridge, 1986) offers a standard neo-Marxist account of amateurism as a form of 'hegemony'; John Lowerson, *Sport and the English middle classes, 1870–1914* (Manchester, 1993) provides essential context without specifically focusing on amateurism itself.
- [2] The standard interpretation is J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge, 1981); this thesis has been extensively refined and frequently republished.
- [3] For an earlier attempt at a synthesis, see Richard Holt, 'Amateurism and its interpretation: The social origins of British sport', *Innovation*, 5 (4) (1992), pp. 19–31; I have since been influenced by the important work of Christiane Eisenberg on competitive values and the transmission of English sports to Germany, notably her magisterial *English Sports und Deutsche Burger* (Paderborn, 1996).
- [4] Ross McKibbin, 'Work and hobbies in Britain, 1850–1950', in Jay Winter, ed., *The working class in modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1983).
- [5] Harold Perkin, *The rise of professional society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), p. 118.
- [6] K. Theodore Hoppen, *The mid-Victorian generation, 1846–1886* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 33–4; see also Francois Bedarida, *A social history of England 1851–1975* (London, 1979), p. 53.
- [7] Peter Mandler, 'Self-Help', *London Review of Books*, 19 Feb. 2004, p. 30.
- [8] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With illustrations of conduct and perseverance* (London, 1877 edn), p. iv.
- [9] Peter Mandler, 'The consciousness of modernity? Liberalism and the English national character, 1870–1914', in Martin Daunt and Bernhard Rieger, eds., *Meanings of modernity* (Oxford, 2001), p. 119; M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge, 1981), *Passim*.
- [10] David Kynaston, *The City of London*, vol. 1: *A world of its own 1815–1890* (London, 1995), pp. 288–9.
- [11] R. Guerriero Wilson, *Disillusionment or new opportunities? The changing nature of work in offices in Glasgow 1880–1914* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 13.

- [12] Kynaston, *The City of London*, vol. 1, p. 209.
- [13] Hugh Cunningham, 'Leisure and culture', in F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge social history of Britain*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 286–7.
- [14] Richard Holt, *Stanmore Golf Club: A social history* (Stanmore, 1993), p. 17; see also 'Golf and the English suburb: Class and gender in a London club, c. 1890–c. 1960', *The Sports Historian*, 18 (1) (1998), pp. 76–89.
- [15] Donald Read, *England 1868–1914* (London, 1979), pp. 244, 259; Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851–70* (London, 1971), pp. 51–2.
- [16] Read, *England 1868–1914*, p. 25.
- [17] Kynaston, *The City of London*, vol. 1, p. 371.
- [18] P. F. William Ryan, 'Going to business in London', 1902, cited in Keith Thomas, ed., *The Oxford Book of Work* (Oxford, 1999), p. 239.
- [19] Kingsley cited in Read, *England 1868–1914*, p. 59.
- [20] Patricia Garside, 'London and the Home Counties' in F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *Cambridge social history of Britain 1750–1950*, vol. 1: *Religion and communities* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 521.
- [21] Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered lives: Public health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983), p. 7; Bruce Haley, *The healthy body in Victorian culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1978).
- [22] Kynaston, *The City of London*, vol. 1, p. 423.
- [23] George Gissing *The NetherWorld* (1889) cited in Thomas, *The Oxford Book of Work*, p. 508.
- [24] Wohl, *Endangered lives*, p. 210.
- [25] Cited in Wilson, *Disillusionment or new opportunities*, p. 1.
- [26] Steven A. Riess, *Sport in industrial America 1850–1920* (Wheeling, IL, 1995), p. 16.
- [27] For an authoritative overview of a vast literature see Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello, *L'histoire du corps*, vol. 2 (Paris, 2005), esp. 'Le retour du corps machine', pp 35–50.
- [28] Roy Porter, *The greatest benefit to mankind: A medical history of humanity from antiquity to the present* (London, 1999), esp. p. 340.
- [29] Peter Stearn, *Fat history: Bodies and beauty in the Modern West* (New York, 1997).
- [30] Haley, *The healthy body*, p. 24.
- [31] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- [32] Tony Collins, *Rugby's great split: Class, culture and the origins of rugby league football* (London, 2005 edn), ch. 1. See also Richard Holt, *Sport and the British* (Oxford 1989), pp. 77–9.
- [33] Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke (London 1881 ed.) cited in David Alderson, *Mansex fine: Religion, manliness and imperialism in nineteenth century British culture* (Manchester, 1998), p. 55.
- [34] J.C. Stobart cited in Christopher Stray, *Classics transformed: Schools, universities and society in England, 1830–1960* (Oxford, 1998), p. 8.
- [35] Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), p. 217.
- [36] *Ibid.*
- [37] Margaret Walter, *The nude male: A new perspective* (London, 1978), p. 242.

- [38] Clive Ellis, *C.B. The life of Charles Burgess Fry* (London, 1984), p. 267; see also the more extensive treatment in Iain Wilton, *C.B. Fry, king of sport* (London, 2002).
- [39] William A. Ewing, *The body: Photoworks of the human form* (London, 1994), pp. 166–70; for examples of the posed style of sporting photograph, see the National Portrait Gallery's *The book of British sporting heroes* (London, 1999); for a recent discussion of the aesthetics of sport see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In praise of athletic beauty* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).
- [40] Keith Thomas, 'Introduction', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodberg, eds., *A cultural history of gesture from antiquity to the present day* (London, 1991), p. 8.
- [41] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- [42] See Mark Girouard, *The return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English gentleman* (New Haven, CT, 1981).
- [43] Edward Grayson, *Corinthians and cricketers* (Havant, 1983 edn), p. 31.
- [44] Cited in Girouard, *The return to Camelot*, p. 248.
- [45] Richard Holt, 'Interwar cricket and the English hero', in Geoffrey Cubbit and Allen Warren, eds., *Heroic reputations and exemplary lives* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 225–41; for a demythologizing analysis of this literature see Derek Birley, *The willow wand: Some cricket myths explored* (London, 2000, first published 1979), pp. 195–208.