

CHAPTER 1

The Sociology of Sport

Sport is a pervasive social institution in nearly every society around the world. In the United States, sport is as much a part of American society and culture as such other major social institutions as the family, religion, politics, economics and education. To ignore sport is to overlook a phenomenon that extends into a multitude of social arenas, including the arts, mass media, the economy, the community, and international diplomacy. In this book we will use the term "sport" to signify its role as a social institution and we will use "sports" to signify specific activities such as football, baseball, or cycling.

Sport reflects the norms and values of the general culture of a society. In American culture, as in most world cultures, winning and success are highly valued commodities. Sport can serve as an excellent exemplar of the cherished "win-at-all-costs" philosophy. This prevailing attitude often leads to elitism, sexism, racism, nationalism, extreme competitiveness, abuse of drugs (including performance-enhancing drugs), gambling, and a number of other deviant behaviors. However, the true spirit of sport often reveals itself as well. The notions of cooperation and team work, fair play, sportsmanship, hard work, dedication, reaching to achieve personal excellence, obedience to rules, commitment and loyalty are also revered values of American society, and that is, perhaps, the primary reason that Americans love sports so much. Despite the highly publicized negative sport stories that are often sensationalized by the mass media, there are far more positive sport-related stories which help to reaffirm that our support of our favorite teams and athletes is not a wasted endeavor.

The institution of sport is very important, useful, and beneficial to American society. Sports adherents share the emotional roller coaster of the fortunes that their favorite teams experience. Both fans and participants find in sport a reaffirmation of central values and myths of the larger society that help give meaning and direction to their own lives. Athletic contests are important to the socialization of youth, to the integration of disparate groups and social classes, to physical and mental well-being, and to the enhancement of community pride.

The Sociological Perspective

Since this book is written from a sociological perspective it is important to clarify a number of fundamental sociological concepts and constructs relevant to the sociological study of sport. Let's begin with the sociological perspective. Among the core tenets of the sociological perspective are the following basic assumptions:

1. *Individuals are, by their nature, social beings.* There are two main reasons for this. First, newborn babies are completely dependent on others for their survival. Second, in order to survive as

a species, humans have formed groups as a defense mechanism against the other animals and the environment.

2. *Individuals are, for the most part, socially determined.* As social beings, we are products of our social environments. Trial and error, reinforcement and modeling account for the primary methods of learning.

3. *Individuals create, sustain, and change the social forms within which they conduct their lives.* Humans are both “puppets of their society” and “also puppeteers” (Eitzen and Sage 1989: 5). Our lives are not biologically predetermined; we are capable (within certain social limitations) of making decisions to alter our life courses. “Through collective action individuals are capable of changing the structure of society and even the course of history” (Eitzen and Sage 1989: 4–6).

Sociology is a broad field with many different theories, methodologies and areas of interest. Sociology is a member of the social sciences; it involves the study of groups, institutions, organizations, cultures and societies. The social sciences, which also include anthropology, economics, history, psychology, and political science, concentrate their study on the various aspects of human society. In contrast, the natural sciences, such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, and physics, focus their studies on the physical features of nature and the manner in which they interact and change. The social scientist is concerned with furthering knowledge for its own sake.

Sociology is nearly always defined as a science that engages in rigorous research guided by theory. The authors define sociology as the systematic study of groups, organizations, social institutions, societies, and the social interaction among people. The word “systematic” is used because sociology is committed to applying both theoretical perspectives and research methods to the examination of social behavior and also because sociologists generally study regularly occurring behaviors. By definition, sociology is a science. A science possesses such characteristics as theory guided by empirical observations, measurement of variables, analysis, synthesis, and replication/public verification. Definitions of the term *science* usually include such criteria as having knowledge and knowledge obtained and tested through the scientific method. The scientific method itself is defined as the pursuit of knowledge involving the stating of a problem, the collection of facts through observation and experiment, and the testing of ideas to determine whether they are right or wrong. As we shall see throughout this book, sociology has a strong commitment to research and to the testing (through statistical analysis) of its theories.

The roots of sociology are firmly entrenched within the scientific tradition. Auguste Comte (1798–1857), one of the earliest sociologists, and the person who coined the term “sociology,” was a strong proponent of positivism. Positivism is a way of understanding the world based on science. Positivists believe that the social world can be studied in the same manner as the natural sciences and believe that “laws” exist that apply to the human species; they merely have to be discovered by social scientists. Comte was an early positivist and his concept of positivism is based on the idea that everything in society is observable and subject to patterns or laws. These laws help to explain human behavior. The role of the sociologist is to reveal these patterns, or laws, of human behavior. “Comte believed positivism would create sound theories based on sufficient factual evidence and historical comparisons to predict future events. The discovery of the basic laws of human behavior will allow for deliberate courses of action on the part of both individuals and society” (Delaney 2005: 25).

In an attempt to understand the laws of society, sociologists often utilize the *sociological imagination*. The American sociologist C. Wright Mills coined the term the sociological imagination to show how our private lives are influenced by the social environment and the existing social forces. The sociologist gains insights into human behavior by utilizing the sociological imag-

ination. According to Mills (1959), "The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meanings for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions" (5).

The sociological imagination stresses the importance of the historical social context in which an individual is found. Mills emphasized that it is important to understand the personal biography (life history) along with the current actions of an individual to truly understand the meaning of his or her behavior. To underscore the importance of this point, Mills made distinctions between personal troubles and public issues. This distinction is critical to fully understand the manner in which the sociological imagination operates. Personal troubles "occur with the character of the individual and within the range of her or his immediate relations with others. They have to do with the self and with those limited areas of social life of which the person is directly and personally aware" (1959: 8). An example of personal trouble would be an athlete who gets "cut" from the team because his or her performance was not good enough to make the team. Public issues "transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of her or his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many milieus into the institutions of a historical society as a whole and form the larger structure of social and historical life" (1959: 8). From this standpoint, "the sociologist acknowledges that social forces, often out of the control of the individual, affect the individual's life for both the good and the bad" (Delaney 2005: 88). For example, let's say an athlete is good enough to make a team's roster but then the league folds due to financial shortcomings (e.g., the former XFL football league). Such an athlete was not "cut" from the team due to a personal shortcoming (personal troubles), but rather because of reasons beyond his control (public issues).

Another example of the application of the sociological imagination to the sports world is provided by Nixon and Frey's (1996) example of steroid use. They argue that when one individual out of hundreds of professional athletes uses steroids, that is an example of a personal trouble. However, when it becomes known that a relatively large number of athletes are using steroids, the problem becomes a public issue. (As we shall see in Chapter 8, steroid use in American society is as much a public issue as it is a personal trouble.)

The Sociology of Sport

The sociology of sport is a subdiscipline of sociology that focuses on the relationship between sport and society. Sport sociology is concerned with the behavior of individuals and groups within sport and the rules and processes that exist within the formal and informal design and makeup of sport. With a commitment toward objective analysis the sport sociologist places a great deal of emphasis on the *evidence*. It is the role of the sport sociologist to keep his or her own biases under control and to refrain from making value judgments while conducting research and presenting findings. In other words, as with any social scientist, sport sociologists are to remain objective and present facts. However, offering suggestions and courses of actions to correct the "wrongs" and injustices found within the institution of sport is within the reform tradition of sociology.

The objective sociological perspective represents a more viable alternative to biological and psychological attempts to explain sport. Sport psychology focuses on the mental processes and behavioral characteristics (e.g., motivation, perception, cognition, self-confidence, self-esteem and personality) of the individual almost to the point where it ignores the importance of social forces. As Eitzen and Sage (1989) explain, biological and psychological explanations of sport focus exclusively on the individual and not the social forces and processes that affect behavior. The sociological approach, in contrast, examines social conditions in the community or society (e.g., varying degrees



More than 33,000 orange-clad fans pack the Carrier Dome on the campus of Syracuse University to watch a men's college basketball game.

of unemployment, leisure time, urban blight, restricted opportunities for minority groups, or distribution of power to a ruling class) that may affect individual decision-making and behavior.

As a discipline, sport sociology has been in existence for at least four decades. When people consider the early sport sociologists, most point to Kenyon and Loy's 1965 article "Toward a Sociology of Sport" and Harry Edwards' 1973 publication *Sociology of Sport*. In 1965, Kenyon and Loy had already declared that sport had "become a cultural phenomenon of great magnitude and complexity" and was "fast becoming a social institution" (24). They also noted that "despite the magnitude of the public's commitment to sport, as a social phenomenon it has received little serious study" (24). This pattern holds true today as sports play an even bigger role in society (than in 1965) and yet is still ignored (or considered somewhat frivolous) by some in academia. Kenyon and Loy (1965: 24) advocated the scientific-sociological approach to the study of sports: If sociology is the study of social order—the underlying regularity of human social behavior—including efforts to attain it and departures from it, then the sociology of sport becomes the study of the regularity, and departures from it, of human social behavior in a sports context. Sport sociology, as Kenyon and Loy see it, is a value-free social science. "It is not an effort to influence public opinion or behavior, not is it an attempt to find support for the 'social development' objective of physical education.... The sport sociologist is neither a spreader of gospel nor an evangelist for exercise. His function is not to shape attitudes and values but rather to describe and explain them" (25).

There are many sport sociologists who disagree with Kenyon and Loy's assertion that the sport sociologist should remain neutral. In fact, they argue that it is the job of the sport sociologist to spearhead change where there are flaws in the system. Snyder and Spreitzer (1978) were among the early sport sociologists who advocated the need for an *applied* sociology of sport. "If the policy implications of sport sociology are not brought out in the research of social scientists, this burgeoning field will die on the vine of academic trivia" (8). Many examples of applied sport sociology will be presented throughout this book.

Conflict theorists (see Chapter 2 for a review of Conflict Theory) have also questioned the commitment to the value-free approach. As Jack Scott stated in his introduction to *Rip Off the Big Game: The Exploitation of Sports by the Power Elite*, "Any serious social scientist must admit, however, that the value-free approach to social science has always had its critics both within and without the social-science movement.... It should go without saying that Marxist social scientists have never accepted the legitimacy of a value-neutral orientation" (Hoch 1972: 3-4). Critics of the value-free approach to sport sociology claim that such an ideology is one of non-involvement and an attempt to free oneself from social responsibility. There remains a great debate among sport sociologists today as to whether the field should maintain a commitment to the roots of sociology as a value-free, scientific approach to the study of sport in society or whether it should be a critical field that concentrates on negative issues. This text will provide a scientific approach while pointing out many of the problems of sport.

Edwards' publication of *Sociology of Sport* (1973) represents a major turning point in the discipline. Edwards compiled an extensive amount of research material and established a leading textbook for the field. He also established the basic properties of sport sociology: "In its broadest sense, this field should be concerned with the descriptions and explanation of the interrelations between sport and other societal components. More specifically, these fragmentary writings have been concerned with the functions of athletics in relation to basic social institutions and processes. The unique feature of the sociological approach to sport, as distinct from that of psychology, has been a focus upon sport in its function as a component of social organization" (10-11).

Kenyon and Loy (1965) reference a work entitled *Soziologie des Sports* (published in Germany in 1921) as one of the first isolated works on sport sociology, but they do not elaborate on its contents. We believe that Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) establishes Veblen as an early pioneer of sport sociology. Of particular importance are his descriptions and analyses of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, as they represent early theoretical explanations of the growing role of sport consumerism in the United States specifically and of Western societies in general. Veblen used the term conspicuous consumption to describe the *nouveau riche* (first generation wealthy people), who purchased luxury items as a means to convey to others their social position. In this regard, the *nouveau riche* were looking for approval from the upper socio-economic classes and envy from the lower socio-economic classes. Conspicuous leisure refers to living a lifestyle where the pursuit of leisure and the appearance of privilege are instrumental in one's behavior. In other words, it involves participating in nonproductive activities.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT DEFINED

The academic and scholarly interest in sport has grown tremendously over the years. And, although the interest in sport comes from a varied array of sources, "sport sociology has been defined to a great extent by the topics that have been investigated, both by those formally trained in the area, and by those who identify with the area in order to legitimate their own work" (McPherson 1981: 10). As a subdiscipline of sociology, sport sociology has a focus on the processes and patterns found within the institution of sport and how these social forces impact human behavior.

The authors define the sociology of sport as the systematic study of the processes, patterns, issues, values and behaviors found in the institution of sport.

As we shall see throughout this book, the social institution of sport has a relationship with all the other social institutions found within a society. Sport affects billions of people around the world either directly or indirectly.

Why Do We Study Sports?

Sport is one of the most significant and influential social institutions found in societies around the world. Sports are a major part of people's lives. Sport participation provides opportunities for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and is an excellent way to help develop a physically fit body. The sports world also provides us with opportunities to gain insight on racism, sexism, labor struggles, structured inequality, and so forth.

SPORT IS SOCIOLOGICAL

Nearly every element of sport has sociological significance. The truth of this statement will be demonstrated throughout the text as entire chapters dealing with specific social institutions and their relation to sports are provided. In brief, sport participation provides personal health benefits for individuals. Sports play a significant role in the culture of a given society. Sports help to provide historical continuity (e.g., through record keeping and maintaining allegiances to a favorite team over a lifetime) and more important, sports have existed throughout recorded history. Sports help to provide continuity in life as sports allegiances formed in childhood generally persevere throughout adulthood. Sport often serves as a positive diversion from the negative aspects of life by providing people a temporary "escape" from the mundane, sometimes monotonous and painful elements in one's personal or social life. Years ago, ESPN ran a commercial featuring a female jogger in an urban environment followed by numerous people who have demands on her life (e.g., husband, son, daughter, boss, women's group, etc.) with the catch-phrase "Without Sports, How Would We Escape?" In short, sport is sociological because it is interconnected with all the other social institutions found in society.

SPORT IS PERVASIVE

The institution of sport has become increasingly important and dominant throughout a large portion of the world. To ignore sport is to ignore a significant aspect of any society and its culture. Add to this the realization that most people have a great deal of leisure time which, for many, involves sports—either as a participant, observer, or consumer. Although the pervasiveness of sport will be detailed throughout the text in a variety of fashions, for now, let's consider the following as samples of the pervasiveness of sport in society:

- Newspapers in most cities devote entire sections of their daily editions to the coverage of sport. *USA Today*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in the United States, allocates one-fourth of its print coverage to sports. In general, newsprint devoted to sport in North America usually surpasses the space given to the economy, politics, religion, the environment or any other single topic of interest.
- In addition to the hundreds of "sports talk" radio stations that exist across the United States, ESPN alone provides more than 9,000 hours of sports talk and event content annually, reaching 24 million listeners a week on 450 nationwide stations, including more than 360 full-time affiliates and clearance in the top 25 markets. ESPN Radio programming and non-ESPN pro-

gramming is also available on Sirius XM and via digital distributors Slacker Radio and Tune In (ESPN 2014a).

- Many sport contests are worldwide events (for example, the World Cup, the Olympic Games, the Tour de France, Wimbledon, and the Super Bowl). Children around the world are exposed to these sport events.
- Sports venues continue to draw large crowds. For example, on February 1, 2014, the Carrier Dome, located on the Syracuse University campus, witnessed 35,446 attend a college basketball game between then #2 Syracuse vs. then #16 Duke and on September 7, 2013, 115,109 fans attended the Notre Dame vs. Michigan football game played in Michigan University's "Big House."
- The pervasiveness of sport is also revealed through Internet sites. In September 2014, the authors typed the word "sport" (on a Google search) and found that there were nearly 400 million sites and another 251 million sites for "sports." And, Google is just one search engine.

As these few examples indicate, sport is quite pervasive in society. (For a closer look at sport pervasiveness in society see "Connecting Sport and Popular Culture" Box 1 at the end of the chapter.)

Sport as a Social Institution

As stated earlier in this chapter, sport is a social institution. Social institutions represent the means (e.g., a set of organized beliefs and rules) that each society develops to meet its fundamental needs. The original social institutions discussed in sociology were the family, religion, education, the economy, and the government or politics. Today, the mass media, sports, science and technology, medicine, and the military are also considered to be social institutions.

Functionalists argue that each social institution is designed to meet specific needs. The family, for example, is responsible for, among other things, the replacement of members of society and teaching the next generation cultural expectations; the government is responsible for maintaining and preserving social order. Conflict theorists argue that social institutions exist to maintain the status quo and therefore disadvantage those without socioeconomic or political power. The interactionist perspective, with a micro focus, emphasizes that human behavior is influenced by the roles and statuses that we possess, the groups to which we belong, and the institutions within which we function. (See Chapter 2 for a more comprehensive review of theoretical perspectives on sports.)

Edwards (1973) describes sport as a "secular, quasi-religious institution" (90). As a secular institution, sport takes on a functional, non-religious role in society by upholding and reaffirming basic values and norms found in that culture. It can serve as the functional equivalent of a religious ceremony that brings a community together under a coherent system of beliefs.

Sociologists are generally concerned with how a social system works; specifically, the norms, roles and structures that hold the system together. The institution of sport provides an excellent system for analysis by sociologists. It is characterized by regulation, formalization, ideological justification and the transmission of culture. Sport as a social institution possesses many general characteristics of all social institutions. The following is a brief review of four key characteristics of sport as a social institution:

1. *A Ranking System (Stratification)*. Within all institutions, groups and societies, a hierarchy (a ranking system) exists. This hierarchy is often based on something of value. In business, seniority and position are valued (e.g., a senior vice president has higher value than an entry-level

clerk). In sport, a hierarchy exists based on such things as "skilled" positions, star performers, and, to a lesser degree, seniority.

2. *Roles and Statuses (the Organizational/Structural Aspect)*. One's role is determined by one's position in the hierarchy. Star players are expected to perform at peak levels at all times. Secondary players do not experience such demands. One's status reflects one's social position in the hierarchy (e.g., head coach, trainer, athlete, team manager, water boy).

3. *Social Control (the Ability to Provide Rewards and Levy Punishments/Sanctions)*. Social control is a mechanism designed to maintain conforming behavior. Sport channels human actions so that they abide with predefined expectations. For example, a coach may have a team rule that if an athlete is late for a film session, team practice, or curfew, that athlete will not be allowed to start (or play) in the next game. Sport itself is filled with rules. There are rules that apply during the game and outside of the game. When rules are violated during the game, a referee will punish the violator with a foul or some other type of sanction. For example, the National Football League has a rule against "excessive" or preplanned celebrations. (Social control and deviance will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 8).

4. *Rules (Norms and Expectations of Behavior)*. The need for social control is the result of the large number of rules in sport. All organizations have formal (written) rules as well as informal rules (how things are *really* done). An example of a formal rule is the NCAA's ban on college athletes from gambling and taking illegal drugs. All groups have informal norms as well, such as making a teammate pay a "fine" for inappropriate behavior, or for making a bonehead play.

In sum, sport has the same characteristics as all other social institutions and is therefore accepted as a social institution in its own right.

What Is Sport?

We have discussed many aspects of sport, but what exactly *is* sport? We could list the vast array of sports from "A" (anvil shooting) to "Z" (zebra hunting). Listing categories of sport is relatively easy. Classifying sport as indoors or outdoors; professional or amateur; and so on; is only slightly more difficult. Nearly everyone believes that they know what a sport is; however, if one is asked to define "sport" that usually causes some difficulty. Formulating a definition that draws clear and clean parameters around what activities should be included and excluded is relatively difficult to do. For example, is the backyard leisure activity of badminton a sport? Years ago, the notion of badminton as a sport would have caused great laughter. Today, badminton is not only considered a sport by some people, it is an Olympic sport! Badminton made its Olympic debut in 1992 at the Summer Barcelona Games with four separate medals for the men's and women's singles and doubles champions. Mixed doubles was added at the 1996 Atlanta Games as a fifth medal. Kickball is another youth activity that has been transformed into a sport. The World Adult Kickball Association is the largest sanctioning body to oversee the official rules of the sport. Now that badminton and kickball are, more or less, viewed as legitimate sports what about such activities as anvil shooting, cup stacking, dodgeball, and zebra hunting; are these activities sports?

In rural areas of the South anvil shoots have become an increasingly popular sporting activity. An anvil shoot involves participants blowing up the blacksmith's tool (anvil) as high as possible in the air. According to a spokesperson for the National Anvil Shooters Association, anvil shooting is "a guy thing" (Hoffman 1996). "Anvil shooting involves placing one large blacksmith anvil upside down on the ground and filling its cavity with a fine grade of black powder. A second anvil weighing up to 150 pounds is then placed upright on top of the bottom one. The powder is ignited and the

top anvil is thrust as high as 125 feet into the air. The earth literally shakes; and the deafening boom, it is said, can be heard from as far away as 15 miles" (Museum of Appalachia 2005). According to the Museum of Appalachia, anvil shoots have a long history in the United States with "accounts that the shooting of the anvil was employed to celebrate the nation's independence, Christmas, and even Davy Crockett's election to the United States Congress." Anvil shoots are becoming increasingly common at events such as July 4th celebrations and are included with other activities such as rail splitting and crosscut sawing. "Odd as the sport sounds—and lethal as it could be among bumblers—it is growing in popularity among those fond of antique tools, rending noises and gravity-defying acts. The usual venues are old engine shows and blacksmith get-togethers along rural highways in the South" (Hoffman 1996: A-18).

The child's game of cup stacking (sometimes known as "sport stacking") became very popular as a sporting activity during the 2000s. There are over 7,500 programs around the world promoting cup stacking. The World Sport Stacking Association (WSSA), formed in 2001 for the purpose of promoting and governing the sport stacking around the world, promotes the standardization and advancement of sport stacking worldwide. As the governing body for sport stacking rules and regulations, the WSSA provides a uniform framework for sport stacking events, and sanctions sport stacking competitions and records (WSSA 2008). (The Guinness Book of World Records tracks records in cup stacking.)

Participants, mostly students ranging from elementary age to college, stack and unstack 12 plastic cups as fast as possible. Cup stacking is both an individual and team sport. Contestants place cups in multiple stacks and sequences (such as "three-six-three" or "one-ten-one") and compete against the clock or each other. Stacking cups has long been popular at summer camps, church youth groups, and special-education classes; but now, professionals are promoting and endorsing the virtues of cup stacking. "Therapists use it with stroke victims to help them regain strength and coordination. Athletic trainers, amateur and professional, encourage clients to stack" (Sefton 2004: A-16). Exercise and sports scientists report findings that indicate cup stacking significantly improves eye-hand coordination and reaction time among participants. Proponents of cup stacking also point out size and strength are not variables to successful stacking; therefore, anyone can excel at this activity.

Dodgeball was once a routine activity in physical education classes for school-aged youth. However, a number of parents and administrators became concerned over potential injuries and impending lawsuits due to the sport's sometimes violent nature. There was also concern that the physically stronger kids were using dodgeball as an opportunity to bully weaker children. Dodgeball began to enjoy an insurgence in interest after the release of the 2004 film *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story* featuring Ben Stiller and Vince Vaughn. The National Amateur Dodgeball Association (NADA) serves as a governing body for adult dodgeball leagues. From their homepage opening statement, the NADA (2006) states that the Association was "created as a recreational pursuit for nontraditional sport enthusiasts."

Another unusual example of sport is elephant racing. Elephant races occur at various locations throughout the world. A Google search for elephant racing will reveal a tourist site listing various elephant races, generally found in Asia. A well-publicized elephant race occurred in Germany in 2000. More than 40,000 spectators watched the event. The idea for the race came from the Indian-born mayor (Ravindra Gujjula) of the town of Altlandsberg, just east of Berlin. Elephant racing is a tradition in India, but only two states currently hold such events. (The International Elephant Race began in Nepal in 2005.) Despite the large turnout in Berlin's Hoppegarten, elephant racing is very controversial. Elephants have protected status in India, since the pachyderm is revered by many Hindus because of its resemblance to the elephant-headed god Ganesh. BBC News (2000)

reported that “members of the Animal Peace group objected to the race and were supported by French film star Brigitte Bardot, German rock singer Nina Hagen and India’s Social Affairs Minister Maneka Gandhi” (1). The event featured 14 circus elephants, half of them African and half Asian, and six races. Promoters of the race insist that the elephants enjoy racing. After crossing the finishing line, the elephants were rewarded with treats of fruits and vegetables (BBC News 2000).

Zebra hunting rounds out our epigrammatic look at the “A to Z” description of sport, or not a sport, assessment. As the name implies, “zebra hunting” entails hunting zebras, generally while on safari on conservation sites. Zebra hunts, condemned by many people, generally take place in Africa but there are areas of Texas where the activity also takes place. One company, African Sky, provides trophy hunting opportunities. Their website, African Sky (2014), describes the weapons necessary to kill a zebra and informs those interested how to become involved in a zebra hunt. The Texas Hunt Lodge (2014) website provides information for a variety of hunting packages open to wild gamers.

Will any of these quasi-sporting activities become labeled as legitimate sports and find their way in such international competitions as the Olympics? What do you think?

DEFINING SPORT

Labeling activities such as anvil shooting, cup stacking, dodgeball and elephant and zebra racing as sports is contingent on one’s definition of sport. The word “sport” has its origins rooted in the idea that it is an activity designed to divert people from the routines of everyday life. “Sport derives its root from ‘disport,’ meaning ‘to divert oneself.’ It carried the original implication of people diverting their attention from the rigors and pressures of daily life by participating in the mirth and whimsy of frolic—some physical activity” (Edwards 1973: 55).

There is a lack of consensus among sport sociologists on how to define sport. John Phillips (1993) even suggests that “in one sense the word *sport* need not be analyzed. Anyone who speaks English knows what sport is and is not” (30). As a sport sociologist, Phillips takes a unique stand as sociologists are known for establishing standardized and operational definitions of key concepts. Phillips reflects the mentality of most students and followers of sport that we all unconsciously *know* which activities our culture defines as a sport and we therefore take for granted what is and is not sport. Snyder and Spreitzer (1978: 11) state that it is important for social scientists to have “workable analytical handles” on the meaning of sport. We agree. Simply being able to list sport will not help the social scientist understand sport sociologically.

Among the earliest social scientists to define sport was Günther Luschen. Luschen (1967, 1970) defines sport as an institutionalized type of competitive physical activity located on a continuum between play and world. He felt that it was particularly important to emphasize the fact that sport is a physical activity which would therefore automatically eliminate such activities as playing cards as being considered a sport—an important point to make as there are some members of the contemporary media (especially ESPN) that would have us believe that playing poker is a sport. Edwards (1973) states, “One of the most salient features of sports is that they always involve physical exertion. This physical exertion is an imperative characteristic that cannot be overstressed. Without it there simply is no sport activity” (55). In his own definition of sport, Edwards emphasizes the physical aspect, as well as the organizational, rule-making, and goal-directedness of sport. Edwards goes on to define sport as “involving activities having formally recorded histories and traditions, stressing physical exertion through competition within limits set in explicit and formal rules governing role and position relationships, and carried out by actors who represent or who are part of formally organized associations having the goal of achieving valued tangibles or intangibles through defeating opposing groups” (57–58).

Nixon and Frey (1996) adapted Edwards and Luschen’s definition and define sport “as insti-

tutionalized physical competition occurring in a formally organized or corporate structure" (3). Describing sport as institutionalized reflects the earlier discussion in this chapter of sport as a social institution possessing such key elements as norms, statuses, roles and social relationships. The second significant element of this definition of sport is physical competition. Physical competition mandates that physical activity and skills are involved in order to determine a winner or loser.

Curry and Jiobu (1984) believe that sports are physical actions but also nondeviant activities: "*Sport* is a physical activity that is fair, competitive, nondeviant, and that is guided by rules, organizations, and/or tradition" (8). Once again, the idea that sport is a physical activity is a part of this definition of sport. The idea that sports are fair is an idealistic view of sport that we all like to believe is true, but realize is not. The most unusual aspect of the Curry and Jiobu definition of sport is the stipulation that sport is nondeviant activity. "In general, deviant activity does not fit our cultural ideas about what sport is or should be. Sport has moral overtones about it. It's supposed to represent the ideals and high goals of our society, something deviance does not do. We therefore find it advisable to keep deviance separate from sport" (11). Idealism should no longer be confused as a primary element of sport. Deviance not only occurs in sport (as Curry and Jiobu do acknowledge) it is sometimes taught and engaged in freely by athletes, trainers, league officials, referees, and owners.

Jay Coakley (2006) defines sports as "institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards" (21). Note once again the idea that sports are physical activities (in this case rigorous) is included in this definition. However, there is a very critical addition to this definition of sport: "*or* the use of relatively complex physical skills." The importance of this amendment is that it allows many other forms of recreation to be included as sports. For example, Delaney has had many students comment to him in his sociology of sport classes, "How can golf be listed as a sport when there is little physical activity involved; especially if golfers use a golf cart?" As anyone who has ever played golf can attest, there most certainly is an element of skill involved; whether it is "complex" or not is debatable. Coakley also includes motivational factors in his definition of sport. Internal or intrinsic rewards are those which come from "inside" the person, a feeling of accomplishment for having achieved some sort of athletic goal (e.g., finishing a marathon regardless of "place" or climbing a mountain and reaching the highest peak). Extrinsic rewards refer to "outside" accolades that one may receive for successful sport participation (e.g., monetary rewards, trophies, cheering and adoring fans).

While we acknowledge that the designation of an activity as a sport may be, to some degree, up to the participants themselves, and while recognizing that different cultures have different perspectives on what constitutes as a sport, we provide a definition that includes certain and precise parameters. Sports are institutionalized, structured, and sanctioned competitive activities that go beyond the realm of play that involve physical exertion and the use of relatively complex athletic skills. We maintain the consistent perspective that sports must involve physical activity and the ability to use skill to gain an advantage over an opponent and we want to make it clear that there is a distinction between play and sports. (This point will be elaborated on later in this chapter.) Thus, although neighborhood kids may play football in backyards across the United States, it is a far different game than when professional or highly skilled high school and college athletes play football as a sport.

UNIVERSAL AND REGIONAL SPORTS

We will discuss a wide variety of sports in a variety of settings throughout this book, but the authors feel it is necessary to briefly distinguish between universal and regional sports here. Remember that sport reflects culture. The great diversity of sport is a result of the diverse world we live

in. Specific sports have appeal in particular regions of the world, while other sports, because of their mass popularity, enjoy a universal following. In the United States, football is the runaway favorite American sport. Around the world, however, *futbol*, or what Americans call "soccer," is the most popular of all sports. It would appear that Americans prefer the hard-hitting violence, strategic planning and offensive scoring of *their* football over the world's obsession with the low-scoring, defense-minded *futbol* (soccer).

Universal sports (e.g., running, swimming, throwing things, soccer) are those sports which appear throughout most of the world. Some sports, such as archery and wrestling, are indigenous to nearly all cultures in the ancient world (Craig 2002). Running and throwing things, such as big rocks, spears and disk-shaped items, are also universal sports. As mentioned above, the world's most popular sport is *futbol*. "Soccer is the world's dominant sport.... The Soccer World Cup draws an audience larger than the Olympics, but barely registers with American viewers. The antipathy that many Americans feel for the way soccer is played is matched only by the distaste of many Europeans for the American style of play.... Americans and Europeans have absorbed the structure and rules of their sports into their psyches, turning the arbitrary rules of nineteenth-century administrators into a way of life" (Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005: 2).

Regional sports are those sports which are not played universally. They may be isolated to specific countries or regions (e.g., Afghanistan's *buzkashi*) or specific areas within a society (e.g., lacrosse has greater appeal in the Northeast than in the Southwest regions of the United States). In light of recent world events, Americans have learned a great deal about Afghanistan's culture, including sports. Under the rule of the Taliban, most Afghan sports were banned. Many national sports have returned to the forefront in Afghanistan since the U.S.-led forces removed the Taliban from power. These sports include cockfighting, kite fighting and *buzkashi*. Cockfighting is controversial throughout the world and yet it appears in many "back alleys" across the United States. Cockfighting is illegal in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia; 40 states and Washington, D.C. list this blood sport as a felony (ASPCA 2014). Cockfighting is a centuries-old blood sport in which two or more specially bred birds, known as gamecocks, are placed in an enclosure to fight, for the main purposes of gambling and entertainment. Although in nature a rooster may fight another over territory or a mate, such fights are usually brief and don't involve serious injury (ASPCA 2014). A cockfight usually results in the death of one or both of the birds. According to the ASPCA (2014), "cockfighting is still popular and prevalent in many other countries, such as France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Belgium, Spain, Haiti, Italy and Malaysia. Many of these countries have well-established arenas with seats or bleachers for spectators surrounding the fight, similar to a wrestling or boxing area." A typical cockfight can last anywhere from a few minutes to more than a half hour. Afghanistan roosters do not fight to the death, but the combatants are bloodied and sometimes blinded before a winner is declared.

Kite fighting is another Afghan sport. Under the rule of the Taliban, participants of kite fighting were imprisoned. "The competition is slow and beautiful, but it's also serious business. The idea is to cut the string on your opponent's kite while it is in the air before he can cut yours.... Kite fighters wager as much as 600,000 Afghans, or about \$5 per match—a hefty sum in a country where most people live hand-to-mouth. The Taliban regime, which banned music, television and most other forms of entertainment, had a particular loathing for kite fighting. Gambling is forbidden in Islam" (Haven 2002: A4). In 2006, Pakistan banned kite-fighting after 7 people were killed in a competition (Shahzad 2006). The kites have glass-coated strings meant to cut an opponent's kite loose. Low-flying kites often cut participants and observers; in some cases they slit the throats of victims. (A best-selling novel, *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini, describes in great detail this potentially bloody sport.)

The most popular sport in Afghanistan is the traditional game of buzkashi—jostling on horseback with other riders trying to grab a decapitated goat.

Buzkashi is a contest between two teams of horsemen over the possession of a dead calf or goat carcass, with the object being for one talented and fearless rider to gain control of the slippery carcass and then separate from the pack of horsemen vying for the same prize. "Buzkashi" means goat, but a calf carcass is often used because it reportedly stays intact longer. The animal is beheaded, bled, and behooved [*sic*] before being used. It can be either gutted or not [Craig 2002: 154–155].

In the movie *Rambo III* Sylvester Stallone's character, Rambo (in an ironic U.S. political misfortune), is in Afghanistan to help rebel forces against Russian "aggressors." Rambo plays the Afghan sport of buzkashi and quickly dominates, earning the praise of the Afghan rebels.

Buzkashi was spread by the Mongol hordes that swept out of China and across central Asia. Today, the sport is played mostly by Turkic people, including the Uzbek, Turkomen, Kazakh, and Kirghiz. Interestingly, the Navajo of North America played a game similar to buzkashi called "the chick pull," with a live rooster replacing a four-legged carcass (Craig 2002).

Among the most entertaining and demanding regional sports in the United States is lacrosse (lax for short). As reported in *Sports Illustrated* (4/25/05), lacrosse was once a longtime niche sport played primarily in New York State, New England, and the Baltimore area; today, it is the fastest-growing sport in the U.S.—at every level. *Sports Illustrated* (4/25/05) reported that the number of youth-league players in the U.S. aged 15 and under was near 186,000 in 2005, a figure double the participation rate of 2001. According to U.S. Lacrosse (2014), the national governing body of lacrosse, a record total of 746,859 players competed on organized lacrosse teams in 2013 (a 3.6 percent growth rate from 2012). In 2013, youth participation topped 400,000 for the first time ever. "Roughly two-thirds of the youth participants are boys (265,428) and more players came from New York (55,298) than any other state" (U.S. Lacrosse 2014). Lacrosse continues to be the fastest-growing sport at the high school level (290,046 players competed in 2013) with a total of 621 schools adding boys' teams and 588 schools adding girls' teams from 2008 to 2013; these figures represent a 34 percent increase in the number of boys' programs and a 36 percent increase in the number of girls' programs. The second-fastest growing high school sports are water polo (13 percent for boys) and ice hockey (14 percent for girls) (U.S. Lacrosse 2014). Lacrosse is also the fastest-growing NCAA sport with more than 35,000 players competing on varsity, club or junior college teams in 2013; 60 new varsity programs were added in 2013, including 8 new NCAA Division I programs (U.S. Lacrosse 2014). There are multiple reasons for the appeal of lacrosse. It is a fast-paced game that combines elements of soccer (constant running), hockey (play behind the net), and football (wearing pads, violent, controlled collisions, one-on-one defenses, zone defenses, set plays). It is an imaginative and wide-open game where most of the participants are not huge, hulking athletes. Youth sport leagues and high schools like lacrosse because it is much cheaper to fund than sports such as football and hockey. With roots in Native American culture, it could be argued that lacrosse is the *true* American sport. (There will be more on lacrosse in Chapter 11.)

DEFINING AN ATHLETE

Have you ever heard someone say, "I used to be an athlete?" Such a statement generally implies that when that individual was younger he played a sport (most likely a traditional sport such as football, baseball, tennis, track and field, etc.), but now that he is older, he does not. In other words, many people agree with Nixon and Frey (1996) that athletics is a synonym for sport played in school or college settings. But what if an individual, who is in his or her 40s, works out for 75 minutes a day, including a three mile run—is he or she an athlete? Or, do you have to play an

organized sport in order to be considered an athlete? A lot of people play golf but we would not refer to all of them as athletes. On the other hand, there are athletes who play golf. Where do we draw the line of distinction between someone who is "physically active" and "athlete"?

A physically active person is someone who puts forth physical energy while engaged in some sort of activity that involves exertion. This may include walking, gardening, hiking, sightseeing, and so on. A physically active person engages in such activity simply for the enjoyment or benefit it provides. Thus, one may walk on a regular basis for health purposes as opposed to training for some athletic event. An athlete, on the other hand, is in training for some specific sports event or participates in a sport while competing against other athletes or previously set records. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an athlete is someone who trains to compete in athletics. Athletics is defined as exercises and games that requiring physical skill, strength and endurance. Note that sport is not specifically mentioned as part of the definition of athletics. Most sport sociologists believe that an athlete is someone who is involved in a sports activity. For Harry Edwards, the distinction is clear. "It is only in sports that the participant can accurately be termed an 'athlete'" (55). Thus, Tiger Woods, a professional golfer, is an athlete, whereas the typical weekend golfer is not. Michael Jordan, now that he is retired, is among the millions of people who "used to be an athlete" but would now be labeled as a "physically active" person.

The idea of Michael Jordan, one of the greatest basketball players of all time, not being labeled as a current athlete is difficult for many people to accept. There is also a heated debate over whether or not a race car driver should be labeled as an athlete. Detractors will claim that race car drivers, NASCAR in particular, simply drive a car in circles, and that, they believe, is something anyone can do. On the other hand, there are those who support the idea that race car drivers are athletes because they meet the criteria. Let's take a look and see. Auto racers do certainly compete against others and do attempt to break established records; and, fans of auto racing certainly believe that it is a "real" sport (something detractors find hard to believe). So now, we have to look at auto racing: Is that a real sport like football, basketball and baseball? We put forth the definition of sport as institutionalized, structured and sanctioned competitive activities beyond the realm of play, and auto racing meets that criteria. The definition also calls for participants who exert physical energy and relatively complex athletic skills. Anyone who has driven for 4–6 consecutive hours, or more, at a given time will agree that it can at the very least be tedious, but is also complex and physically challenging. Consider the track at Charlotte Motor Speedway with "its corners, which slope upward from a lush green infield to the wall at an angle of 24 degrees. The setup offers a terrific calf workout for a pedestrian climbing the track, but it's punishing to a body in the driver's seat. Taken at 192mph ... the banked curves subject the driver to almost four times the force of gravity" (Lawrence 2014: 52). To put this in perspective, NASA has serious concerns for the safety of its astronauts being exposed to 3 g's for the nine minutes of liftoff (Lawrence 2014). This strenuous activity would seem to be enough to meet the criteria of physically challenging. What do you think?

Distinctions Between Leisure, Play and Sports

As stipulated in our definition, sports go beyond the realm of play. Consequently, it is important to make distinctions between a number of related terms, including leisure, play and sports.

LEISURE

Most economists and sociologists generally regard leisure as unobligated time that is free of work or maintenance responsibilities. The term leisure suggests fun, distraction, and pleasure. "Leisure came

to use through the Latin word *licere* by way of the French, *leisir*, the Middle English *leisere* and finally to its present spelling, leisure. The root word, *licere*, meaning to be permitted, evolved into another word—license. The word leisure literally meant exemption or permission as applied to opportunity afforded that was free from legal occupation" (Arnold 1980: 13).

Leisure provides time and opportunity for personal and creative growth, self-actualization, and intrinsically motivated goals. Obviously, most of us look forward to our leisure time and we feel that we deserve some time off from work and other obligations so that we can recharge our "battery." The idea that we "deserve" leisure time is a relatively new notion as historically, most people had little time to pursue leisure because they were too busy trying to meet primary needs (food, clothing and shelter). Leisure was reserved for the upper class, the privileged members of society. All of this would change with the rise of industrialization and the resulting formation of a middle class. Industrialization afforded an opportunity for the masses to enjoy leisure. Among the most notable economists/sociologists to examine the relationship between industrialization and rise of leisure prospects was the sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929).

More than a century ago, Veblen defined leisure as non-productive consumption of time. "Time is consumed non-productively (1) from a sense of the unworthiness of productive work, and (2) as an evidence of pecuniary ability to afford a life of idleness" (1934: 43). The primary concept of Veblen's theory of the leisure class is *conspicuous consumption*, "according to which the consumption of goods from the very early 'predatory' stage of history to the present, has served not so much to satisfy men's true needs or to provide what Veblen chooses to call the 'fullness of life' as to maintain social prestige—status" (Adorno 1981: 75). Thus, Veblen noted that when people acquired an economic surplus they did not purchase necessity items; instead, in an attempt to build their self-esteem, they purchased products that conveyed to others their increased socioeconomic position.

Veblen believed that individuals participated in "wasteful" behaviors as a means of attaining self-esteem. Sport participation (even as spectators) allows members of the lower economic classes to engage in some of the same activities as the wealthier members of society. Obviously, this can be very meaningful to people. As for the wealthy, Veblen theorized that merely possessing wealth and power is never enough. Instead, wealth or power must be put into evidence for esteem to be awarded. Veblen stated, "Not only does the evidence of wealth serve to impress one's importance on others and to keep their sense of importance alive and alert, but it is of scarcely less use in building up and preserving one's self-complacency. In all but the lowest stages of culture the normally constituted man is comforted and upheld in his self-respect by 'decent surrounding' and the exemption from 'menial offices'" (Mitchell 1964: 230). Thus, Veblen understood why some people participated in leisure activities; however, he felt that leading a good productive life should be enough for one's positive self-image. Outside verification from others should be unnecessary. Clearly, Veblen's upbringing is reflected in his view of the leisure class. His parents worked hard so that their children had an opportunity to pursue advanced education. Their frugality afforded this opportunity. As a result, Veblen learned to appreciate and value hard work.

Many people disagree with Veblen's conclusion about leisure. Beginning with industrialization and continuing in contemporary society, individuals who work hard feel "entitled" to leisure time. They also feel a need to remove themselves, at least temporarily, from their work environments and enter preferred leisure domains. "The very development of capitalist society has thus produced forms of physical leisure pursuit ... for getting away from it all, for escapism and ecstasy" (Brohm 1976: 88). Many sport sociologists believe that leisure is important to so many people because these activities often reflect one's social identity—they define who people really are, more so than other labels (e.g., occupation).

Americans appear to be both hard workers and people who enjoy their leisure time. Americans work far more hours than workers in many other nations, including the ten industrial nations. According to CNN Money (2014), when factoring in part-time workers, Americans work an average of 38 hours per week. The industrialized nation with the lowest average hours worked per week is the Netherlands at 29 hours. Following Netherlands is Denmark (33); Norway (33); Ireland (34); Germany (35); Switzerland (35); Belgium (35); Sweden (36); Australia (36); and Italy (36) (CNN Money 2014). Based on statistics compiled by Gallup (2014), American adults employed full time work an average of 47 hours per week, almost a full workday longer than what the standard five-day, 9-to-5 schedule entails (Saad 2014). "In fact, half of all full-time workers indicate they typically work more than 40 hours, and nearly four in 10 say they work at least 50 hours" (Saad 2014). The 40-hour work week is a widely regarded standard measurement for many federal employment laws—including the Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare"—and it is this threshold that is used to define what a full-time employee is (Saad 2014). On the other hand, nearly every American age 15 and over (95 percent) engaged in some sort of leisure activity, such as watching TV, socializing, or exercising; this includes fully-employed adults (without children under age 18) spending an average 4.5 hours a day engaged in leisure activities (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). Fully-employed workers with young children have about one less hour of leisure time per day. Not surprisingly, watching TV is the number one leisure activity (2.8 hours per day per person) and socializing (e.g., visiting with friends or attending/hosting a social event) was the second most popular (BLS 2014). The BLS (2014) data also reveals that men are more likely than women to participate in sports, exercise, or recreation on any given day—21 percent compared to 16 percent.

PLAY

Play is a universal concept. It is as old as culture itself. Play, like leisure, represents an absence of obligated time. Play is an activity that is performed voluntarily during leisure. Play, however, is less organized than most leisure pursuits and is unstructured and open to fluidity in behavior. "Play is an enjoyable experience deriving from behavior which is self-initiated in accordance with personal goals or expressive impulses; it tolerates all ranges of movement abilities; its rules are spontaneous; it has a temporal sequence but no predetermined ending; it results in no tangible outcome, victory or reward" (Snyder and Spreitzer 1978: 12). For example, two girls wander toward the swing set and begin to swing aimlessly. Next, they pick up a basketball and haphazardly take shots at the hoop. When they are bored they drop the ball and walk away. This type of behavior is the direct opposite of seriousness—it is play. "Play provides an opportunity to temporarily shelve reality and thus find one's inner self again" (Hellendoorn, van der Kooij, and Sutton-Smith 1994: 25).

Guttmann (1988) describes two types of play: spontaneous play and organized play (games). Spontaneous play is voluntary, flexible, and uncertain with latitude for innovation. For example, at family picnic baseball games, youths may be allowed four or five strikes (instead of the customary three) and adults may be required to bat from their "opposite" side (left-handed for natural right-handed batters). Adaptations to rules are allowed, such as "do-overs"—repeating the play for some reason (e.g., the batter wasn't paying attention when a called "strike" pitch was made). In sports, there are no do-overs; you must comply with the rules and be ready to play. Recreation is a type of spontaneous play. As Nixon and Frey (1996) explain, it is a leisure activity designed to refresh the mind or body. Arnold (1980) explains the origins of recreation:

In Latin, *recreatio* carried a connotation of restoration or recovery from something. Its root is in the word *re-creo* (to create again) to refresh, invigorate, or revive. Further references include such inferences as to amuse oneself after obligation: *laxandi levandique animi gratia*, having to do with which we are dealing has a metaphysical quality. If we are to accept the various synonyms given,

we would need to substantiate activity as a means for attaining relaxation or rest. The assumption indicated would produce a dichotomy: rest from activity or a cessation of movement on the one hand and diverting activity on the other hand [9-10].

Thus, recreation has a strong component of leisure. It is meant to be a refreshing activity, and it is playful. It may, or may not, be productive.

As play becomes more serious, more organized, we have the beginnings of competitive contests and sports. According to Guttman (1988), organized play, or games, involves both noncompetitive games (e.g., kicking a ball with friends) and competitive games (contests). Competitive games can be divided into two categories: intellectual contests (e.g., chess) and physical contests (sports). With organized play, games tend to have less freedom, they are bound by rules. There are designated time limits and boundaries (e.g., organized baseball has a set number of innings, bowling has 10 frames a game) and there is nearly always a clear winner (and loser) at the end of organized games. "Since games imply winners and losers, there may be a degree of emotion or ego investment involved, although such investment tends to be small compared to that found in sports and athletics" (Figler and Whitaker 1991: 14). Incorporating the elements of games described above, Snyder and Spreitzer (1978) define games as "activities with an agreed-on organization of time, space, and terrain, with rules that define the objective and limit the pattern of human behavior; the outcome, which is to determine a winner and a loser, is achieved by totaling or accumulating objectively scored points or successes" (12).

Contests may be between two individuals, between two teams, between an individual and a group, between an individual or team and inanimate nature (such as mountain climbing, white water rafting), between a person or group and animate nature (e.g., hunting, fishing, or bull fighting), or between an individual or team and an ideal standard (e.g., a home run-hitting contest). A number of "competitive eating" contests have sprung to life in the past decade. In fact, there is an international governing body, the International Federation of Competitive Eating (IFOCE), that oversees all competitive eating contests. The IFOCE requires that all competitive eaters must be at least 18 years old. Contestants who throw up during competition are disqualified. The IFOCE sponsors over 100 contests a year internationally. The IFOCE, based in New York City, keeps official eating records and ranks its professional eaters (a top 50). We will discuss competitive eating in greater detail in Chapter 16.

Contests may also involve a struggle between animals (e.g., dog racing or horse racing) or between a real and an artificial animal (as in a greyhound race against a mechanical rabbit) (Calhoun 1987). Games and contests are rule-bound, earnest and organized. As our definition of sport implies, the more institutionalized and structured competitive games and contests become, the more sport-like they turn out to be. This is not meant to imply that we consider competitive eating a sport, or competitive eaters as athletes. Furthermore, considering that numerous people around the world starve to death every day, the concept of competitive eating hardly seems sporting.

SPORTS

We defined the term "sports" earlier in this chapter. Sports, by their very design, are highly structured, they involve institutionally defined rules, give rise to a hierarchical authority pattern, and are often so over-regulated that they seem only nominally related to play. Although it is commonly said that athletes "play" sports, the rules and customs that control the behaviors of athletes often distances sports from the realm of play. Sports represent the formalization of play, with every move scrutinized and subjected to rules and rules-interpretation by game officials and league administrators. The participants of sports (athletes, owners, trainers, etc.) have an investment with the games they play. Their very livelihoods are dependent upon success in the sports world.

Generally, the investment aspect of sport outweighs the recreational, playful aspect of the game itself. Thus, as Edwards (1973) notes decades ago, sport is often “anything but a diversion to its participants. In fact, for many participants it is sport that produces the primary stresses and strains in their lives” (55).

The Most Popular Sports in the United States

It is well understood that sports are very popular in the United States and around the world. Any discussion of the popularity of sport in society presupposes the necessity to clarify what is meant by “most popular.” There are two primary ways of looking at sports popularity—by sport participation and by asking people, “What is your favorite sport?” The authors examined numerous studies, including their own previous research, and organizational websites. Sifting through it all we found that the most popular participatory sport in the United States is bowling (53.5 million) (Delaney and Madigan 2009; Thomsen 2006). When controlling for sports only as a criterion, the next most popular participatory sports are running/jogging (38 million); fitness walking (36 million); basketball (32 million); golf (26 million); tennis (18 million); and inline skating (17 million). When allowing for recreational activities to join the mix of most popular participatory leisure activities we have bowling still at number one, followed by treadmill exercise (40.8 million); stretching (42.3 million); freshwater fishing (42.1 million); tent camping (38.6 million); and horseback riding (38 million).

There is much more data available on the topic of people identifying their favorite sports team. Remember, naming one’s favorite sport does not mean that one participates in that sport. In the United States there is no doubt that the favorite sport of Americans is football, specifically the National Football League (NFL). According to Harris Poll data cited in ESPN.com, pro football has been the favorite sport of Americans for 30 straight years (Rovell 2014). In 2014, 35 percent of American sports fans named the NFL their favorite sport, followed by Major League Baseball (MLB) (14 percent); college football (11 percent); auto racing (7 percent); National Basketball Association (NBA) (6 percent); National Hockey League (NHL) (5 percent); and college basketball (3 percent) (Rovell 2014). In the mid-2000s, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) was riding fast with popularity and some polls had them third in popularity behind only the NFL and college football; but in the second decade of the twenty-first century NASCAR has slipped in popularity.

If attendance figures were used as a measurement of the popularity of sport, NFL venues would reign supreme, as the average per game attendance is nearly 70,000 (68,397). Statistics compiled of the five major team sports in the United States show that MLB is second (30,504); Major League Soccer (MLS) (18,559), NHL (17,587), and NBA (17,407) follow (Statista 2014a). We should not read into attendance figures as a sole guide of popularity, as baseball plays far more games (162) than any other sport and their total attendance figures would far surpass the NFL which has only 16 games per team per season. MLS data is misleading too as they play the fewest total number of games. With an average of 97,722 spectators for Sprint Cup races, NASCAR would rank higher than any of the big five team sport venues, but they have just one race per week and play in much larger venues (36 Sprint Cup races, totaling 3.5 million) (Diel 2013).

The Most Popular Sports in the World

Americans love *their* sports. We like our football and we do not call it “American football” like the rest of the world. The rest of the world loves their *fútbol*, which Americans call soccer.

Our fastest growing sport is lacrosse and yet most of the world does not play it. We do not play cricket and yet, for the rest of the world, this is the most popular sport in highly populous nations. Americans like auto racing, but we like NASCAR; the rest of the world prefers open-wheel (especially Formula One).

Once again, we updated our own research and examined the research of others and found that determining a ranking of the world's most popular sports presents a more daunting challenge than examining the most popular sports in the United States. It is universally accepted that soccer is the number sport in the world. The game is played across the globe by far more than 100 nations. It is especially big in South America, Europe, Central America, China and Africa. The World Cup, played every four years, is rivaled only by the Olympics for top television viewership. According to CBS Baltimore (2014), the 2012 London Games was broadcast to over 220 territories with 3.6 billion viewers (31.1 million U.S. viewers). The 2010 World Cup reached 214 territories with 3.2 billion viewers (the top draw in the U.S. had 11 million viewers: U.S. vs. Ghana). While everyone wants a gold medal in the Olympics, many will be handed out; conversely, there is only one World Cup trophy—making it the most coveted trophy in the world. (In North America the most coveted trophy, arguably, would be the Stanley Cup.) The 2014 World Cup enjoyed far greater success in American markets. For example, the World Cup Final pitting Germany against Argentina drew 17.3 million on ABC and another 9.2 million on the Spanish network Univision Deportes for an impressive total U.S. viewership of 26.5 million (Vertelney 2014).

The second most popular sport in the world is cricket. Few Americans have played cricket or even watched a match, let alone understand it. And yet, it is the number one sport in the populous country of India, as well as in many other nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Australia and parts of the Caribbean and Africa. Generally, field hockey and tennis are ranked 3rd and 4th most popular but there is some debate over this. We list the remaining most popular sports in the world as baseball, basketball, volleyball, table tennis (ping pong), rugby and golf (although some research indicates American football has cracked the top ten) (Delaney and Madigan 2009; Top End Sports 2014).

As we will demonstrate throughout the text, for many people, sport is so important to them, it is like a religion. Sport is not a religion in the same sense as Catholicism, for example, is a religion, but in terms of the secular meaning and self-identification that sport allegiances provide. There are members of society who do not closely follow sports. They will have a hard time understanding how sport can provide such significant meaning to their lives. This same rationale is applied by those who do not adhere to a particular religion and have a hard time understanding another's devotion to a religion.

Connecting Sports and Popular Culture

Box 1: Sports Pervasiveness in Popular Culture: Bobbleheads, Candy Bars and More!

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, sports are a vital aspect of billions of people's lives across the globe. It was pointed out that many newspapers devote an entire section of their news coverage to sports, generally surpassing the space allocated to any other specific social institution such as politics, economics, religion, or the environment. In addition to newspaper coverage, there are literally hundreds of sports talk radio stations and radio programs dedicated to the single topic of sport. We can add to this the great amount of sports programming on television. The ESPN Network is so popular that they have numerous spin-off networks such as ESPN2, ESPN3,

ESPNNews, ESPN Classic, ESPNU, and ESPN Deportes. ESPN3, once known as ESPN360, is an online streaming service that provides live action and replays of sports from around the world as well as major college football and basketball. ESPN3 is just one source of sports on the Internet. In brief, sports are so pervasive they are available for our consumption 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

That so much news coverage is allocated to sport compared to other social institutions and news issues that are, arguably, more important is a clear indicator of the importance placed on the sports world by so many people. (It also helps to justify the field of sport sociology and texts on the sociology of sport.) On occasions when news events of the day are so dramatic sports do take a back seat. And yet, during "states of emergency" (e.g., terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and social unrest) the resumption of sporting events is often viewed as a beacon of light that the immediate danger has waned and it's time to try and resume a sense of normalcy.

The media attention given to sport is just one indicator of the pervasiveness of sport in society. As we pointed out in this chapter, not only do billions of people view sports, millions of people attend live sporting events. Attending a sporting event is much more than simply going to a ballgame, it is often a social event that entails planning and arranging one's daily/weekly schedule. Sports such as football and auto racing also imply all-day tailgate parties (See Chapter 4 for a discussion on tailgating). In contemporary society, media attention is also measured in terms of the social media presence of athletes and ball teams. As we shall see in Chapter 15, athletes have a strong presence on Facebook, Twitter, and other media outlets.

The pervasiveness of sport is revealed through sport-related movies and videos. The 2004 Academy Award for best film went to a boxing movie, *Million Dollar Baby*. It was about a female boxer (played by Hilary Swank) and a trainer (played by Clint Eastwood). The film has grossed over \$100 million and also garnered Academy Awards for best actress (Swank), best supporting actor (Morgan Freeman) and best director (Eastwood). A recent ESPN poll of the top 20 sports films of all time lists the following: *Bull Durham*, *Rocky*, *Raging Bull*, *Hoosiers*, *Slap Shot*, *The Natural*, *Field of Dreams*, *Caddyshack*, *The Hustler*, *The Longest Yard*, *North Dallas Forty*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Hoop Dreams*, *Breaking Away*, *White Men Can't Jump*, *The Bad News Bears* (the original version), *Chariots of Fire*, *Brian's Song*, *Eight Men Out*, and *When We Were Kings*. All of these are among the most popular films ever made.

The pervasiveness of sport is also demonstrated in many other ways including the oddity of parents naming their children in honor of sports-related themes and now we are not simply talking about naming a child after a favorite athlete (e.g., fans of Peyton Manning naming their son Peyton or fans of Abby Wambach naming their daughter Abby). Believe it or not, a number of parents have named their children in honor of ESPN! Variations include: ESPN, Espn, and Espen. In 2006, Leann and Rusty Real named their son ESPN Montana Real after the sports network and former football great Joe Montana (Associated Press 2006). Leann had promised her husband that if they ever had a son he could name him. A young boy showed up at a Baltimore Orioles game on a summer's night in 2014 with a sign that read, "My name is really Camden Yards." The Orioles play at Camden Yards Stadium. Camden's parents confirmed that the boy, a fan of the O's, is named after the park (*Sports Illustrated* 9/15/14). Parents have also named their children Wrigley Field (Chicago Cubs Stadium) and Crimson Tide (University of Alabama nickname) (*Sports Illustrated* 9/15/14). Micheal Dow and first wife, Crystal, named their child "Cuse," the shortened nickname for his favorite college team Syracuse. They were going to name their daughter Sarah Cuse Dow, which would have been very clever, but named her Cuse Flynn Dow instead (the middle name is in honor of former Syracuse basketball star, Jonny Flynn) (*The Post-Standard* 1/25/15: C-2).

It is common for popular athletes to have food items, such as sandwiches and drinks, named

after them. For example, Reggie Jackson ("Reggie!" bars) and Ken Griffey, Jr. have candy bars named for them and former Buffalo Bills quarterback Doug Flutie had corn flakes ("Flutie Flakes") named after him. A number of athletes have sandwiches named after them that appear in local delis; they usually remain on the menu for as long as the athlete remains popular. Some athletes have barbeque sauce named after them, such as former NFL player William "the Refrigerator" Perry and his "The Fridge BBQ Sauce." Golfer Arnold Palmer was known to enjoy combining lemonade with ice tea and now the drink is commonly known as "the Arnold Palmer." There are countless other examples of athletes being named after food items.

Sports franchises commonly give away a wide variety of promotional items to induce fans to attend live sporting events. Among the more common give-away items are beach towels, team ball caps, team t-shirts, key chains, hockey pucks, baseballs, miniature baseball bats, magnets, posters, water bottles, and so on. Many spectators look forward to "Bobblehead night" when they are given a free promo Bobblehead. Sport fans (including the authors of this book) really enjoy Bobbleheads of their favorite athletes. In turn, athletes realize that it is an honor to have their face on a Bobblehead. The authors, like most sports fans of their generation, complain however that today's Bobbleheads do not really bobble, especially compared to Bobbleheads of the past that used a giant spring to assure that the head of the figurine actually bobbles with a slight touch. Today's Bobbleheads rarely actually move up and down. Nonetheless, they make for a great collection item for die-hard sports fans.

Sport itself is a hugely popular social institution. Sport's connection with popular culture all but assures that the people cannot ignore the pervasiveness of sports in society.

SUMMARY

Sociology involves the systematic study of society; especially the social institutions and people found within a given society. Sport continues to grow in importance in societies around the world. The scientific study of sport will help provide great insights regarding human behavior in their cultures.

Sport reflects the mores, values and general culture of a society. The systematic study of sport, therefore, can provide a mirror into such negative issues as elitism, racism, sexism, nationalism, competitiveness, the abuse of drugs, and other deviant behaviors. More importantly, though, it can help one understand the positive aspects of societies such as cooperation, hard work, dedication, loyalty, understanding rules, and ethical norms.

Despite the highly publicized negative sport stories that are often sensationalized by the mass media, there are far more positive sport-related stories which help to reaffirm that our support of our favorite teams and athletes is not a wasted endeavor.

Sociology is a scientific endeavor which teaches us to look beyond "common sense" and utilize "the sociological imagination" in order to understand how our lives are influenced by social forces. Sociologists generally look at the big picture and study institutions that make up society and the corresponding cultures that are connected with them. The sociology of sport is a subdiscipline of sociology that focuses on the relationship between sport and society.

Sport sociology has existed as a discipline for at least four decades, although Thorstein Veblen was a pioneer in this field with his 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. In his time, sports were primarily considered an activity of the wealthy class. Today, sports as recreation are played by the masses as well as by elites and represent a \$160 billion industry.

While interest and participation in sport have increased, it is not easy to define what activities

fall within it. There is a lack of consensus among sports sociologists on how to define sport, but such key elements as institutionalization, competition, external and internal rewards, and physical exertion seem to be constant. In addition, sports can be said to be whatever people label as sports.

Distinctions can be made between universal sports, which appear throughout the world, and regional sports. Regardless of such distinctions, sport reflects culture. It is connected to the universal concept of "play," voluntary activities performed during leisure time. As play becomes more organized and less spontaneous, societies experience the beginnings of competitive contests and organized play. Sports, then, are highly structured, rule-bound, hierarchical activities which play a major role in binding people together and giving meaning to their existences. The scientific study of sport, therefore, is a means to understand the processes, patterns, issues, values and behavior found in the activities.

KEY TERMS

Athlete A person who is in training for some specific sports event or participates in a sport while competing against other athletes or previously set records.

Athletics Exercises and games that require physical skill, strength and endurance.

Conspicuous Consumption A term coined by Thorstein Veblen; it refers to spending money, time and effort quite uselessly in the pleasurable business of inflating the ego.

Conspicuous Leisure A term coined by Thorstein Veblen; it refers to living a lifestyle where the pursuit of leisure and the appearance of privilege are used instrumental in one's behavior. In other words, it involves participating in nonproductive activities.

Contest An organized competition. It may be between two individuals, between two teams, between an individual and a group, between an individual or team and inanimate nature, between a person or group and animate nature, or between an individual or team and an ideal standard.

Culture The shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and rules about behavior that exist within a society.

Leisure Unobligated time that is free of work or maintenance responsibilities.

Leisure Class A term used by Thorstein Veblen to describe people who engaged in non-productive economic behavior.

Natural Sciences Disciplines such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, and physics, which focus their studies on the physical features of nature and the manner in which they interact and change.

Organized Play Activities which are bound by rules, in which there are designated time limits and boundaries and nearly always a clear winner and loser.

Play An activity that is performed voluntarily during leisure.

Positivism A way of understanding the world based on science. Positivists believe that the social world can be studied in the same manner as the natural sciences and believe that "laws" exist that apply to the human species; they merely have to be discovered by social scientists.

Recreation A leisure activity designed to refresh the mind and/or body.

Scientific Method The pursuit of knowledge involving the stating of a problem, the collection of facts through observation and experiment, and the testing of ideas to determine whether they are right or wrong.

Social Institutions A set of organized beliefs and rules that establishes how a society will attempt to meet its basic social needs.

Social Sciences Disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, economics, history, psychology, and political science, which concentrate their study on the various aspects of human society.

Social Structure The organization of society—its social positions and the ongoing relationships among these social positions, the different resources allocated to these social positions, and the social groups that make up the society.

Society The largest collection of people in group form.

Sociological Imagination A term coined by C. Wright Mills. Sociological imagination stresses the importance of the historical social context in which an individual is found, and the ways in which our private lives are influenced by our social environment and existing social forces.

Sociology The systematic study of groups, organizations, social institutions, societies, and the social interaction among people.

Sociology of Sport The systematic study of the processes, patterns, issues, values and behaviors found in the institution of sport.

Spontaneous Play A type of play which is voluntary, flexible, and uncertain with latitude for innovation.

Sports Institutionalized, structured, and sanctioned competitive activities that go beyond the realm of play, involve physical exertion and the use of relatively complex athletic skills.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Provide at least five examples of the pervasiveness of sports in contemporary society.
- What do you think of the definitions of “sports” and “athlete” provided in the text? Do these definitions reflect how you would define sports and athletes?
- Should dodgeball be played in gym (physical education) classes? Why or why not? Have you ever played dodgeball? Does your college have dodgeball as an intramural sport? Should they?
- Why are sports so important in American culture? What social institutions do you think are the most important for a society?
- Why do so many popular films deal with issues of sport? Do you think this is a good or bad thing? Think of some recent examples of films that have sport as their central theme.
- Describe the differences and similarities between leisure, play and sports. Provide examples of each. Which activity—leisure, play or sports—consumes more of your time?