What if the Players Controlled the Game? A Radical Proposal Concerning the Crisis of Governance in Sport

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Abstract

Throughout my career a sub-text in my work has been a concern with the effects of cultural hegemony on sport and other forms of physical culture. This concern has included the effects of globalization (particularly Americanization), the effects of institutionalization (particularly the power of organizations such as the International Olympic Committee), and the effects of commercialization (particularly through commercial media and corporate sponsorships) in restricting the democratic involvement of participants, and in limiting what Roland Renson refers to as ludodiversity.

In addition to an apparent crisis of governance in organized sports, fewer sports are receiving financial support, and the ways in which sports are played - their form and meaning are becoming increasingly limited to become a global sport monoculture. However, Claude Lévi-Strauss reminded us that "[The more a civilization becomes homogenized, the more internal lines of separation become apparent; and what is gained on one level is immediately lost on another." This article examines the crisis of governance in sport, and follows the trajectories of various alternative and grassroots sports in order to speculate what sports would look like if they were truly democratized, if their form and meaning were controlled by the participants.

Key Words: Governance, Grass-roots sport, Democracy, Homogenization,
All you umpires, back to the bleachers. Referees, hit the showers. It’s my game. I pitch. I hit. I catch. I run the bases. At sunset, I’ve won or lost. At sunrise, I’m out again, giving it the old try.

Ray Bradbury, 1979
"Coda," Fahrenheit 451

The Crisis of Governance in Sport

In 2000, the year of the Sydney Summer Olympics and shortly following the International Olympic Committee (IOC) corruption crisis over bidding for the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, Sunder Katwala (2000) wrote: "It is difficult to find anything else in the world quite so badly governed as international sport" (p. 90).

Little appears to have changed and subsequent revelations, together with research and journalistic investigations at all levels of sport (including national, professional, and even inter-university sport governance), suggest that Katwala may have been understating the problem. As Bruynincks (2011) notes: "The world of sports has traditionally operated under exceptionally large autonomy. Sports events, games and competitions take place in a sort of separate sphere detached from normal rules and regulations in society" (p. 14).

The autonomy of sport, the lack of regulation, combined with the fact that sport is rarely considered to be a serious matter of national or international policy, has resulted in widespread problems. These include problems:

➢ With athlete safety, violence control and punishment in some sports. Once limited to boxing, concerns are now beginning to result in lawsuits against professional ice hockey and (American) football leagues, growing concerns about concussions and traumatic brain injury (TBI), and a new and growing concerns with discipline, regulation and player safety.

➢ With team selection and other forms of due process for athletes. These problems have resulted in the establishment of athletes' unions and players' associations, and in the formation of arms' length agencies such as the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (CRDSC/
SDRCC), and the International Court of Arbitration for Sport (TAS/CAS).

➢ With doping and the integrity of sport. These problems resulted in the establishment of arm’s length agencies such as the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA/AMA);

➢ With gambling, match fixing, and the integrity of sport. This is now a major item on the agenda of the IOC, and many professional sport organizations; although there appears to be resistance to establishing a World Anti-Match Fixing Agency.

➢ Corruption and problems with financial transparency and accountability in sport organizations.

➢ Lack of equitable representation and democratized governance in sport organizations.

➢ Problems of athlete maltreatment and child protection.

In order to understand the emergence of these problems it is important to understand that no one ‘owns’ sport. Sports are a cultural ‘commons’, collectively shared by all who participate in and/or enjoy them.

In the case of professional sports, entrepreneurs may ‘own’ teams, but very often in, for example, North America that idea of ownership is extended to the ownership of the players. Professional athletes are not like other workers, employees who are ‘hired’ or ‘contracted’ to play. Rather, they are commodities who are sometimes highly rewarded but who are bought and sold, ‘drafted’ and traded, just like other commodities. In North America, feeder leagues from which the highest professional leagues draw their players are often referred to as ‘the farm system’. In Robidoux’s (2001) study of professional ice hockey players in the American Hockey League (AHL), a feeder league for the highest professional level National Hockey League (NHL), he extends the farm/commodity analogy: "The players are literally cultivated on the farm; only those with suitable qualities are 'picked' to be used in the NHL market. The cultivation period, moreover, is limited, and those who do not develop sufficiently are eventually replaced with new 'stock'" (p. 190). Troubled labour relations, growing concerns about due process and player health and safety, and even the international traffic in young players in some sports, may all be attributed to the '
exceptionalism' of professional sports and relatively unregulated sense of 'ownership' in professional sports.

At the non-professional levels of national and international sports, the executives of International [Sport] Federations (IFs) and National Sport Organizations/National Governing Bodies (NSO/NGBs) do not 'own' their sports. Rather, they are the stewards of a sport (or multi-sport Games such as the Olympic, Paralympic, Asian, Commonwealth, Pan-American, and so on); they are trustees, entrusted by players, their families, and the fans of the sport with the governance of an activity that, it should be noted, anyone may play without reference to them. These governing organizations have their origins in the emergence of organized 'amateur' sports in the second half of the 19th century when, as Gruneau (1983, 2006) noted, "a way of playing [a game or sport] became the way of playing" [emphasis added] when the emerging organizations codified the sports by writing the rules of play, and also introduced a set of moral rules to determine who could play and also their codes of behaviour during play.

As a result of historical circumstances beyond the scope of this paper, including the globalization, mediatization, commercialization and commodification of sports, together with the politicization of sports and their use to promote nationalism, the trustees of sports have come to act as the 'owners' of the sports, increasingly so since the early 1980s. On the one hand, the sport organizations are the trustees and managers of the sports, ensuring that rules are followed and that championships and Major Games are organized. On the other hand, the more successful sport organizations may also now be seen as the Boards of quasi-national and transnational corporations, engaged in profit maximization while marketing and protecting the 'brand'. However, given the conflicted status of the organizations, their moral status as trustees and corporate executives may be evaluated in terms of how well they address the three tenets of corporate social responsibility - the triple bottom line of profits, social benefits, and environmental benefits. The current crisis of governance is a clear indication that the trustees of those sports worst affected have exploited their relatively autonomous, self-regulated status, and are failing to honour their stewardship of the sport, or to generate the social and environmental benefits expected of responsible corporations (see, for example, Jennings, 2006).
The autonomy of international sport organizations includes exemption from national and international human rights, labour and equality laws, regulations and charters. Thus, as listed at the beginning of this section, there are numerous problems, many of which concern the human rights of athletes, especially at the higher levels of sport. Violations include: athletes' personality rights (i.e., an athlete's right to control the commercial use of his or her name or image); the right to determine where, when and how often they will play; player health and safety; the rights of child athletes; the rights of student athletes, and so on. However, it is important to acknowledge that players are often complicit in failing to assert their rights because of their determination, even desperation, to play at the levels of sport controlled by the national and international sport organizations. In many ways, the spoken or unspoken claims of 'ownership' may be considered as yet another enclosure of the (cultural) commons.

**A Radical Proposal**

Given the now widely recognized crisis of governance in sport a crisis that results from an assumption of ownership with limited or no regulation, and a crisis that is now being recognized and addressed by organizations such as Transparency International, and Play the Game (the organization that drafted the Cologne Consensus, 2011), and even by some sport organizations (e.g., the IOC, and FIFA - the international soccer federation);

➤ Given that professional sports labour relations are a serious problem in sports ranging from tennis to soccer;

➤ Given that the previous section has outlined a number of serious issues related to governance in sport that need to be resolved;

➤ Given that the 'owners' of teams and leagues, and the trustees of sports, behave as if they own the sports, and sometimes the athletes;

➤ Given these circumstances, and given little prospect of change in the near future; and

➤ Given that the 'owners' of teams/leagues and the trustees of sports appear only to accede to changes that benefit the sport and its players when pressured by players, fans, and/or external sources (e.g., international pressure and sport boycotts helping to end apartheid sport in South Africa; ongoing activism by women's sport
organizations helping to increase gender equity in sports; players' unions and associations improving the working conditions and remuneration of professional athletes; the European Union and the European Court of Justice ensuring the right to work of professional athletes in the Bosman decision; pressure by various governments causing the IOC and IFs to deal with doping through the formation of WADA; and various other decisions).

It may be appropriate to ask what would sport look like if the players controlled the game?

**What if the Players Controlled the Game?**

The death of Eric Hobsbawm in October, 2012, at a time when I was still thinking about and working on this paper, was an important reminder of the influence of British Marxist historians such as Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, and E.P. Thompson on the development of the sociology of sport. They recognized the importance of culture, and the significance of popular culture which is why they were widely read by British and Canadian critical sociologists of sport as the field of study moved rapidly from its critical shift to its cultural shift during the 1970s and 1980s (Ingham and Donnelly, 1997). Forms of popular culture, such as sport, had not previously been considered worthy of study. These historians "understood, long before anyone else, that culture is what shapes the world. They also saw that culture is totally democratic and comes from the people; [their work provides] a powerful sense of culture as an endlessly creative field of play, where people build and destroy utopias every day. These men set out the expansive, democratic sense of culture we take for granted today" (Jones, 2012).

They, along with others (sociologists and theorists), provided the basis for the critical cultural studies approach that became so prominent in the sociology of sport. As new, more 'fashionable' approaches to the study of sport started to become popular, the critical cultural studies approach has been somewhat marginalized. Despite this, revisiting the approach is an important reminder to focus again on the production, reproduction, and transformation of popular cultural forms such as sport, the democratic nature of popular cultural forms, the hegemonic processes that have stifled
democratization in sport and precipitated the crisis in governance, and the active levels of resistance that are not too difficult to observe.

Studying the crisis in governance in sports has been a part of my work for the last few years with the Centre for Sport Policy Studies at the University of Toronto. It slowly began to occur to me that several strands of my research and writing during the last 30 years - work that I had previously thought of as unrelated - has a common subtext: namely, the rights of players and the structure, form and meaning of sports. In various ways I have been concerned with the increasing powerlessness of players, and with the democratization of sport and physical activity, and I am now able to ask: What if the players controlled the game? What would organized sport look like if the players were free to be the cultural producers? How would it be different?

Three overlapping strands of research are outlined in the following three interrelated sections. The first concerns the democratization of sports and physical activities together with the diversity of forms of sports and physical activities - what I will call physical cultural diversity - and the threats to democratization and diversity posed by an increasingly powerful global sport monoculture. The second concerns sport subcultures, especially alternative sport subcultures in which the players did control the game, and the threat to player control posed by the growing institutionalization of the sports. The relationship between human rights and athletes' rights provides a third theme in my research - a bridge between work in the sociology of sport and sport policy, but also a connecting theme for some of the previous work. I briefly outline my work in these areas, and then conclude by speculating what sport might look like if the players controlled the game.

1. Physical cultural diversity and democratization vs. Global sport monoculture

We can easily now conceive of a time when there will be only one culture and one civilization on the entire surface of the earth. I don't believe this will happen, because there are contradictory tendencies always at work - on the one hand towards homogenization and on the other towards new distinctions.
The more a civilization becomes homogenized, the more internal lines of separation become apparent; and what is gained on one level is immediately lost on another. This is a personal feeling, in that I have no clear proof of the operation of this dialectic. But I don’t see how mankind can really live without some internal diversity (Lévi-Strauss, 1978, p. 20, emphasis added).

Lévi-Strauss’ optimistic reflection on the potentially heterogenizing effects of globalization is reminiscent of Williams’ (after Gramsci) assertion about hegemony as a process: “…it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own…” (1977, p. 112).

Our understanding of the powerful effects of globalization on sport over the last 150 years has not been fully developed. We are aware that, until the middle of the 19th century, most games and sports were played locally and that the rules of games such as ‘football’ could vary from village to village, town to town, or region to region (Dunning, 1976). The games of working people and their children were democratized to the extent that the participants controlled how, when and where games were played, and who could play - in other words, they controlled the form and meaning of their games and sports. The sports and games of elites were also controlled by the participants, but were usually much more exclusive; and across the social spectrum other exclusions may have been imposed (e.g., on the participation of women). However, when, as noted, a way of playing became the way of playing; as sports became institutionalized and rules were codified (see Guttman, 1978; Coakley and Donnelly, 2009, pp. 4-5 and 63-64); as the sportization process took these newly codified sports to all parts of the world (Elias and Dunning, 1986), and as international competitions were established in various sports, the first steps were taken towards a global sport monoculture.

The emergence of a global sport monoculture took a great leap forward in the 1980s with increasing mediatization of sports, and with the convergence of the two major and competing ideologies of sport, professionalism and Olympism/amateurism, into a single dominant
ideology that I referred to as Prolympism (1996a). The strength of Prolympism is evident, not only in the widespread, even global popularity of certain mediated sports (soccer/football, basketball, cricket, rugby, baseball, and so on) and major games such as the Olympics, but also in the constricting effect of Olympic sports on national sport cultures. So important has representation and success at the Olympic Games become in the global sporting arms race that national sport policies and funding are drawn more and more to Olympic sports and to the high performance participants in those sports (Donnelly, 2010). For example, the Crawford Report (2009) on The Future of Sport in Australia pointed out that archery (an Olympic sport with relatively few participants in Australia) received more government funding than cricket (a national sport with widespread participation) precisely because cricket was not an Olympic sport. And Ren (2008), writing with reference to the Western cultural hegemony of Olympic sports, noted that China as the third Asian country to host a Summer Olympics, had expected to add a Chinese sport (wushu) to the Olympic programme - as had Japan (judo) and Korea (tae kwon do) in previous years. Judo and tae kwon do are the only two of 26 Summer Olympic sports that are not European or American in origin. Ren points out how certain European and American sports still dominate the Summer (and Winter) Olympic programme, with new sports now being added for media and youth appeal (e.g., BMX biking) rather than for high rates of participation, cultural diversity and international representation.

The growth of a global sport monoculture has thus been accompanied by a corresponding loss of physical cultural diversity, and of democratization. I have argued previously that, in cultural terms, retaining cultural diversity (e.g., languages, musical cultures, and physical cultures) is as important as retaining genetic/bio-diversity (Donnelly, 1988), since it keeps alive the idea that there is an infinite variety of forms and meaning associated with human movement, and sustains the sense that humans are themselves the producers of cultures, including movement cultures (i.e., democratization). Democratization can be seen as a prerequisite of, and a condition for the production of physical cultural diversity, as sports and games are produced, reproduced, and transformed by the participants.
The loss of democratic involvement is evident in the increasing powerlessness of participants - particularly those in professional sports and the Olympic sports - to determine the form and meaning of their participation. As I have argued previously

"True democratization will involve a diffusion of the power to define the practices and values [meaning] of sport and leisure activities" (Donnelly, 1993, p. 426). In a global sport monoculture where, as noted in the first part of this paper, team owners and the boards of national and international sports organisations behave as if they 'own' the sports, and sometimes the players, and do so with support from the financial power of media and other sponsoring corporations, players (and fans) have little say in determining the form and meaning of their participation. Players are continually reminded that they could jeopardize their careers if they speak out on issues not supported by those who control them.

Returning to the Lévi-Strauss and Williams quotes at the beginning of this section, it is apparent that the emergence of a global sport monoculture has had a powerful homogenizing effect on sport culture. However, there is evidence of a counter trend, a dialectic (Lévi-Strauss) or resistance (Williams). I have argued previously that the globalization of an American style of sportainment (evident, for example, soccer, cricket, rugby and the Olympic sports as well as American professional sports) was now widespread, but continually accompanied by local adaptations, variations, and resistances. Both Roland Renson (1996) and Henning Eichberg (bodily democracy) (2013) have recorded and participated in the revival of traditional forms of physical culture, some previously thought to be lost forever, and a folk games revival movement is spreading. At the other end of the spectrum, the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and other emerging economic powers will want to see aspects of their national physical cultures on the world's stage, and will continue to pressure the IOC, for example, for the inclusion of new sports (such as wushu) on the Olympic programme.

Between these extremes are ongoing critiques, challenges, and the active production of new physical cultural forms. For example, Whannel
(2008, pp. 101-102) has proposed a democratized version of Sport for All that includes:

- An egalitarian intention. Genuine Sport for All, with positive discrimination to counter existing structures and attitudes;
- Adequate facilities and funding to make Sport for All possible;
- Social ownership of stadiums, sport centres, recreation land, and the subsidiary leisure industry; and
- Democratic control of sport facilities and all levels of sport organizations. These facilities and organizations should be controlled by those who work in and use them.

And Perryman (2012) has recently challenged the elite and costly nature, and limited participation evident in a number of sports on the Olympic programme (e.g., equestrian sports, sailing) arguing that in a democratized Olympics, the IOC would "choose sports on the basis of their universal accessibility" (pp. 89-99; for example, tug-of-war, darts, and orienteering). The production of new physical cultural forms is outlined in the following section.

2. Sport subcultures vs. Institutionalization

The second, and related theme provides specific examples of the freedom of physical cultural production, and the ways in which some sports have become constricted by their incorporation into the institutionalized structures of the global sport monoculture. My research on sport subcultures has focused on alternative types of sport subculture, characterized by their resistance to mainstream sports culture. I now realize more clearly that they were also characterized by their democratization - for the most part, the players controlled the game. My main research focus was on mountaineering/rock climbing and rugby (Donnelly, 1993; Donnelly and Young, 1985, 1988), but also learned from the research of others on surfing, windsurfing, snowboarding, skateboarding, ultimate, and other so-called 'alternate' sports.

Of particular interest is the cultural transformation, especially the institutionalization of activities such as free-style skiing and snowboarding, and their incorporation into the global sport monoculture. For example, the freestyle skiing sports (aerials, moguls, and ski ballet) were developed in the 1960s and 1970s by a group of American Olympic skiers who protested
that they were "having no fun" in the regimented world of international skiing. They left Olympic skiing to produce what they then called 'hot-dog' skiing, only to find that - by the late 1970s - its popularity led to the sport being pursued by the international ski federation (FIS) and the NGB/NSOs for skiing. By 1988, freestyle skiing was incorporated into the global sport monoculture as it became a demonstration sport at the Calgary Olympics. Snowboarding followed a similar trajectory, from being produced and developed by young people who were unhappy with the cultural limitations of downhill skiing, to rapid growth in popularity, incorporation by the FIS, and inclusion on the 1998 Nagano Olympics programme (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011).

There is a sense here in which it is easy to compare the global sport monoculture with the Borg (Star Trek) - "resistance is futile... You will be assimilated." However, referring back to Lévi-Strauss and Williams, there is continual evidence of: (a) participant-controlled cultural production in various sports, some of which are eventually incorporated into the global sport monoculture (e.g., slope style - to appear at the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics) and others not; (b) of negotiations in sports that have caused, for example, the FIS and the Olympics to include aspects of a sports' unincorporated culture into its institutionalized competitive form (e.g., the inclusion of music, dress styles, and irreverent attitudes into, for example, Olympic half-pipe competitions); and (c) struggles, resistances, and divisions in various sports, ranging from the maintenance of a 'street style' of BMX biking and skateboarding, to cross-over participation between incorporated and un- (or less-) incorporated forms of the sport, and outright refusals to participate in incorporated forms of the sport (e.g., Norwegian, Terje Hakonsen, was considered to be the best half-pipe snowboarder in the world in 1998 - he refused to participate in the Nagano Olympics, claiming that snowboarders should not be turned into a "uniform-wearing, flag-bearing, walking logo" (Melgren, 1998). Some sports, such as mountaineering/rock climbing, remain outside of the global sport monoculture and, despite the emergence of sport climbing competitions and a desire on the part of a few to return to the Olympic programme, the sport seems likely to stay uninstitutionalized and unincorporated (cf., Donnelly, 1993, 1995, 2003, 2004).
For the purposes of this paper what is striking is the ways in which the players were apparently giving away the game to the control of others. Apparently seduced by the possibility of greater publicity and media coverage, increased sponsorship and other forms of income, and the undeniable attraction of potentially winning an Olympic medal, participants have, in some cases, traded away their control of an activity their democratic rights to determine the form and meaning of participation, for these potential gains. The loss of power often results in a structuring and limiting of the activity into a regulated, competitive form, and a consequent loss of grassroots cultural production and physical cultural diversity. But, what is also striking is the way in which so many participants in sports have continued to struggle against becoming a part of a homogenized global sport monoculture.

3. Human rights and Athletes' rights

The violation of athletes' rights in the autonomous and unregulated system of sport governance was noted in the first part of this paper, and athletes' rights have been implicit in the previous sections. My interest in human rights and athletes' rights started with research during the 1990s on social inequality in sport (e.g., Donnelly, 1995b, 1996c), and on children's rights in sport (e.g., Donnelly, 1997; Donnelly and Petherick, 2004). This transformed into a more direct interest in human rights and athlete's rights as I changed direction towards sports policy research in the late 1990s (e.g., Kidd and Donnelly, 2000; Donnelly, 2008).

Research evidence suggests that children's rights, women's rights, and labour rights are frequently violated in sports. For the purposes of this paper it is important to recognize that human rights and athletes' rights provide an important framing device for attempting to increase the power and rights of participants in sports, and for resisting the autonomy and hegemony of sport organizations in the global sport monoculture. Human rights/athletes' rights provide a framework for democratization and good governance reforms in sports such that athletes are both represented and given a voice in decision-making that involves them and their participation. Even physical cultural diversity is recognized in human rights frameworks, such as Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) which deals with the rights of minorities, "in community with other
members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language." More recently, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) recognized the rights of aboriginal peoples in many sectors, including retaining their own cultures - which includes sports, games and dances.

Conclusion: What Would Sports Be Like if the Players Controlled the Game?

"The game belongs to those who play"

(Globe & Mail editorial, August 2, 2011, p. A12)

This editorial in the Globe and Mail newspaper in Canada was written in reference to organized youth sports. A recent report (Côté, 2011) titled, *More than a Game: The Power of Soccer for Youth Development*, had noted, "positive outcomes do not automatically result from sport participation" (p. 4). In fact, "Many sport programs designed to foster positive youth development are in fact doing just the opposite" (Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2005), because of the critical and controlling presence of adults (parents and coaches). To achieve positive developmental outcomes, "The best indicator of an adequate role played by adults in an organized [sport] program is the enjoyment that the players experience" (Côté, 2011, pp. 7-8). The newspaper's headline was a reminder of who the game is supposed to belong to, but the players rarely feel that it does.

In fact, the over-coached, over-controlled, excessively criticized situation experienced by players in youth sports often continues through a player's career into adult and even professional sports. For example, the coach-dominated catenaccio defensive style developed in Italian soccer stifled attacking play and creativity, putting outcome before performance and limiting both the players' and spectators' enjoyment of the game. As one player told me, "No football player would ever think of creating this style of play." Ice hockey has recently been subject to similar critiques, with reference to "robotic players," and a "control-freak era of... coaching." "

[Professional players will say privately that there are now so many coaches on a team... that they can barely take a shift without someone criticizing it" (McGregor, 2012, p. S3). With such hyper-levels of control so widespread in
sport it is difficult to find examples where the players control the game, but there are some to draw from.

In 2004, a group of American women revived and adapted the older sport of roller derby to create the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA). The governing philosophy of this women-only sport, that has now begun to expand internationally, is "by the skaters, for the skaters" (wftda.com/mission). In other words, the sport is run on strict democratic principles, including "setting standards for rules, seasons, and safety, and determining guidelines for the national and international athletic competitions of member leagues. All WFTDA member leagues have a voice in the decision-making process..." The sport is, of course, institutionalized, but in a far more progressive way than most sports; however, it is not immune to incorporation by the global sport monoculture. The international roller sports federation (FIRS) and USA Roller Sports have both made advances in an attempt to incorporate WFTDA. Some of the better players have been persuaded, especially since the roller sports federation is recognized by the IOC - although roller sports have not yet been included in the Olympics. However, the democratically run organization of WFTDA has not yet been persuaded that they would have anything to gain by joining FIRS, a male-dominated IF (cf., M. Donnelly, 2012).

Roller derby shares another characteristic with the informal levels of a number of 'alternative' sports such as ultimate, skateboarding, snowboarding, BMX biking, surfing, and rock climbing/mountaineering - namely, there are few coaches or professional instructors.' More experienced participants usually teach the necessary skills to less experienced participants and novices, and encourage them to practice, be safe, and be creative. Those who believe that coaching and professional instruction are necessary in order to reach the highest levels of a sport would be well-advised to observe the incredible levels of skill, the extraordinarily difficult and even dangerous 'tricks' achieved by participants who have never been coached or received formal instruction. The culture of the sports is produced, controlled, and developed by the participants, and their achievements are a salutary reminder that players are quite capable of reaching high levels of skill and achievement without the involvement of agents of control.
Even the formal, institutionalized sports that constitute the global sport monoculture have informal levels of participation where the players are self-organized. These levels of sport stand as a reminder that no one 'owns' sports, but also represent important examples of player control. For example, new sports and variants of sport, such as ultimate, futsal (indoor soccer), beach soccer (or beasal) and beach volleyball were all developed and organized by players, and became popular as sports run "by the players" before their various levels of incorporation. And the 'pick-up', recreational, 'beer league', player organized levels of sports such as soccer, ice hockey, touch football, cricket, baseball/softball, and basketball all occur without reference to or control by the NSO/NGBs or IFs for the sports.

It is important not to romanticize the informal levels of sports. They can have their own problems, but they are problems created by, and to be resolved by the players. Two examples playground basketball and pick-up ice hockey (shinny) - are indicative of the types of outcome possible when players control the game. In major cities in the United States, and especially New York, playground basketball was a site where players developed their skills, sometimes to be recruited to higher levels of the sport, but also where the modern game was created (Tolander, 1976/2004). The styles of play, and the move that were developed at this player-controlled level the game were at first rejected by the basketball establishment, then subsequently embraced to become the predominant style of play in the sport. The playgrounds were incredibly rich sites for (men's basketball) cultural production. Pick-up ice hockey is more characterized by its adaptability. It is a game that reminds us that, outside of formal organized settings, we learn and 'know' a great deal about how to organize and play sports. The games have complex rules that are understood and shared by the players, but not written down anywhere. The rules are adapted depending on the particular circumstances of the game (where and when it is being played), and who is playing (for example, it is common to include players with different genders, ages, and levels of skill and ability in the game); and they are enforced by the players and not by a referee.

When Jay Coakley studied children's informal games and compared them to children's sports organized by adults, he found that children who organized their own games usually emphasized four things to make the
games enjoyable: increasing action (usually with more attacking play and more scoring); increasing personal involvement (everyone plays); creating close scores (making adjustments so that there are no lop-sided scores); and maintaining friendships (Coakley and Donnelly, 2009, pp. 138-139). In playground basketball, pick-up hockey, and many other informal levels of participation, the 'rules' produced by adults are generally based on the same principles.

I conclude with one final example of the sport where I have carried out the most research, and which appears to best manifest the principle of players controlling the game. Since the earliest days of mountaineering, climbers have developed and adapted a consensus about the forms, values, and goals of their activity. However, there was never a way to enforce the consensus. The size of mountains and mountain ranges were (and are) such that the activity is impossible to regulate. Any attempted restrictions would also fly in the face of the free spirit of discovery and exploration. Thus, since the earliest days of the gentlemen amateurs, climbers have trusted each other to act in ethical ways (Donnelly, 1994).

These principles continue to dominate the sport that is, for the most part, governed by a socially constructed, socially reconstructed, and socially sanctioned set of rules still known as 'ethics' among climbers. Such rules are unenforceable, relying on moral suasion. They are locally variable and, in the anarchic culture of climbers, they are preferred over any codified set of rules. Changes and sanctions are debated in face-to-face interaction, in the climbing journals, and now on-line, but the only sanctions available are ridicule, and the refusal to record a claimed achievement. And yet, the activities of mountaineering/rock climbing are just like other sports in terms of competition (for a first ascent, an ascent in 'better' style than previously recorded and, in some cases, the speed of an ascent), and in maintaining a record of achievements (first ascent, first female ascent, first winter ascent, and so on).

The unenforceable rules do not mean that there is no regulation of the activity, or the spaces where it occurs. Climbing bans have been imposed in some areas, with varying degrees of success; and some national parks attempt to impose sign-in and sign-out procedures for climbers. Various attempt have been made to impose training and standard qualifications, and to restrict climbing to those so certified, but these have only been
enforced for outdoor education and guiding (insurance) purposes, and are widely rejected in other parts of the climbing community. Systems of enforceable rules in institutionalized sports ensure the cultural reproduction of those sports; changes occur slowly. Where ethics and moral suasion govern a sport, change is a constant as each new generation seeks new challenges and forms of expression in the sport. The second generation of climbers realized that, if they conformed to the standards of the first generation (find the easiest route to the summit, and claim the first ascent), there was very little left for them to do – a particularly frustrating condition when their climbing skills and equipment were better than their predecessors. As one second generation mountaineer wrote, with reference to the first generation: ‘They have picked out the plums and left us the stones’. This clever pun refers to both the stones (pits) of fruit, and to the fact that the second generation began a move from more easy angle snow and ice climbing to much more steep rock (stone) climbing in order to find new and different routes to those already claimed summits. A new route became almost as (and sometimes more) important than originally reaching the summit.

Since that time, each new generation of climbers has had the capacity, if not always the inclination, to make changes in the form and meaning of mountaineering – a feature that has led to progressively more difficult ascents. Climbers have engaged in cultural struggles which were at first intergenerational, but by the 1930s had inter-class features, and more recently international aspects, to determine the form and meaning of the sport. And each time there was such a change in the sport, the retiring generation often condemned it. Each active generation of climbers, as it retired, has tended to claim that it had reached the limits of what is possible in the sport - no further development of difficulty was conceivable without it being suicidal, or so flouting the prevailing ethics as to be cheating. Each subsequent active generation has proved its predecessors wrong. They have altered the rules structure while maintaining the sport (i.e., they have not cheated); and they have in general kept the death toll down.

The approximately 150 year history of modern mountaineering/rock climbing make it an the exception that proves the rule – i.e., the rule about sports institutionalizing. It is also a model for alternate forms of sport. Institutionalization often has a petrifying effect on sports, tending to freeze
them at the moment the rules were written and enforced, and stifling the creativity of subsequent generations of participants. Try to imagine what other sports would look like today if each new generation of players had had the capacity to make changes in the form and meaning of the sports – to re-invent them. Of course, there is always an exception that challenges any theoretical analysis, and sumo wrestling provides an interesting case. It is a professional sport, run by the Japan Sumo Association (JSA), and controlled by participants and former participants who also train new participants in the various 'stables' of wrestlers. However, the sport characterizes unchanging tradition, authoritarian and hierarchical control, and it recently experienced a corruption crisis causing the Japanese government to appoint members to the JSA board.

It is impossible to predict what a sport will look like / how it will change, if the players control the game. But these examples of sports and levels of sport (and readers can probably think of many more) where the players are to a great extent in control of the game, are indicative that more research and theoretical analysis is necessary in order to negotiate and understand the conditions under which sport might be organized more democratically, where the players actually are able to control the game, and perhaps employ professional expertise when and where necessary to assist with the administration of their game. However, if we consider the majority of examples provided, they are suggestive that such player controlled sports will: be more democratic - they will be run "by the players, for the players;" display more physical cultural diversity - a likely outcome of the increased creativity and experimentation that can result from increased player control; and incorporate precisely those characteristics that produced enjoyment in children in Coakley's research on informal games - action, personal involvement, close scores, and friendships. In the final analysis, if sport and active leisure involvement can have positive effects on health and quality of life, then the benefits should be available to everyone. There is no stronger argument for more democratization of sport and active leisure.
Notes

1. There is some evidence that references to professional players as "cattle" or "beef" may be common currency among senior management and owners in North American professional sports. In the recent NHL labour dispute (a lock-out of the players), a senior vice president for the Detroit Red Wings team, commented: "The owners can basically be viewed as the ranch, and the players, and me included, are the cattle. The owners own the ranch and allow the players to eat there" (ESPN, September 22, 2012).

   espn.go.com/nhl/story/_/id/8410211/Detroit-red-wings-hit-fine-range-250000

2. For example, the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics were allowed to proceed with significant funding from the Canadian and British Columbia governments despite the fact that the absence of ski jumping events for women was a direct violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In a court challenge, it was ruled that the IOC and the international ski federation (FIS) were not subject to Canadian law (see, for example: Travers, 2011; Vertinsky, et al., 2009).

3. Eichberg (2011) provides an important analysis of how sporting monocultures are able to eradicate local games. And. And Mrozek (1987) adds a note of caution to local games revivals: "...the consciousnes of having to preserve the culture fundamentally alters what is preserved - turning it into a museum piece" (p. 38). However, museums also have a political effect; preserving physical cultural activities helps to keep the form alive, but in their new temporal and social context new meanings may emerge.

4. Rugby is not generally considered to be an 'alternative' sport. It was included here because the sport maintained an increasingly anachronistic set of amateur sport traditions (e.g., a 'gentlemanly' code of conduct, celebrating with opponents following a game) far longer than other sports (Donnelly, 1993; Donnelly and Young, 1985). The rapid professionalization of the game saw its incorporation into the global sport monoculture during the 1990s.
5. In the first half of the 20th century, Olympic medals were awarded for mountaineering achievements.

6. Women-only sports have been sites where players often enjoyed democratic control over the form and meaning of the activity. For example, before women were given full access to the Olympics, they organized Women’s Olympics during the 1920s and 1930s. Events were different in a way that reflected women’s values at the time. For example, to encourage bodily symmetry, throwing events were scored on the basis of the combined score of throws with both the left and right hand.

7. Of course, as these sports institutionalize and commercialize, some experienced participants will establish careers as instructors, and set up camps or schools. However, many participants will be involved, and will continue their involvement and development because of their relationships with more experienced participants.

8. The following section is adapted from Donnelly (2004).

9. Rationalization, bureaucratization, and codification were all identified by Guttmann (1978) as aspects of the modernization and institutionalization of sport. However, these characteristics lend themselves readily to more in depth sociological analysis (e.g., Weber, 1905/2003; Ritzer, 2008). Weber uses the iron cage analogy to capture the stifling effects of rationalized bureaucratic institutions, but Ritzer’s McDonaldization thesis captures a number of elements of the preceding discussion, including the homogenization of global culture, and the dehumanizing effects of rationalization whereby, in sport for example, players can become replaceable parts in a workplace (team).

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the comments made on an earlier draft of this paper by Bruce Kidd and Michael Atkinson. They have added a great deal to the final version. And I would like to acknowledge the discussions I had with Henning Eichberg, Grant Jarvie, and Roland Renson - they helped to frame some of my ideas presented here.
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