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Review Article

History, Theory and the 'Civilizing Process'

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Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005). Pp. 310 £70.00 (hb) and £22.99 (pb). ISBNs 0-714-65353-5 and 0-714-68290-X.
Eric Dunning, Dominic Malcolm and Ivan Waddington (eds.), *Sport Histories. Figurational Studies of the Development of Modern Sports* (London: Routledge, 2004) £65.00 (hb). ISBN 0-415-28665-4.

When it was first published in 1979 Eric Dunning and Ken Sheard's *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* was one of the first significant publications in the academic study of sport in Britain. Alongside the early works of John Bale, Richard Holt, Tony Mason, Tony Mangan and Gareth Williams, it helped to establish the history of sport as a serious and scholarly activity. The book traced the development of rugby from pre-industrial folk football to the 1970s. Its thesis was that the sport is an example of what Norbert Elias described as the 'civilizing process', a belief that 'a long-term change in patterns of violence-control has occurred in West European societies' between the Middle Ages and modern times (*Barbarians, Gentlemen and Player*s [*BGP*], p. 14), and thus it seeks to explain the history of rugby in terms of its changing standards in the control of violence. It has now been republished by Routledge, with minor textual amendments and a new afterword tracing the evolution of rugby union since the 1970s.

Late in 2004 a complementary volume edited by Eric Dunning, Dominic Malcolm and Ivan Waddington, *Sports Histories*, was also published. This is a collection of essays which uses the sociological approach to sports history pioneered by Eric Dunning and Norbert Elias to look at the histories of a number of sports, including boxing, soccer,

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rugby, cricket and tennis. Two of the chapters, Graham Curry on soccer and Andrew White on rugby union, are directly related to the interests of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, while the others seek to illuminate the histories of particular sports using the same methodologies. It is appropriate therefore to review the two books as a conceptual whole. [1]

The republication of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Player*s is very much to be welcomed, although needless to say there are some aspects which today seem dated and perhaps even quaint. The idea that a possible solution to football hooliganism was to persuade its perpetrators to play rugby union is probably one that the authors would wish to forget (*BGP*, p. 245). And the belief that Everton fans support Liverpool when the latter plays teams from outside Liverpool (*BGP*, p. 240) suggests that neither author had spent much time on Merseyside. It is to the credit of the authors that they have chosen to let the original work stand and not excise these passages.

As a text, it is useful to place *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* in the context of the literature of rugby union. In many ways it is a product of the 'thaw' in rugby union writing which began in the 1960s, perhaps best exemplified, in differing ways, by the work of journalists such as Geoffrey Nicholson and John Reason. The decline of deference during this period, together with the growth of professionalism in other, previously amateur, sports, led to a widespread questioning of traditional norms and authority within rugby union. Many of the shibboleths of the game came into question, including the Webb Ellis myth and the 1895 split. One of the ironies of the new edition of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* is that the anonymous preface to the new edition indulges in a spot of myth-making of its own by claiming that 'one of the many discoveries of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* was that the story of the involvement of William Webb Ellis was a myth' (p. xi). In fact, the 1979 BBC television series *World of Rugby* made exactly the same point, and even O.L. Owen's 1955 official history was distinctly unenthusiastic about retelling the story. The book's conclusion, that rugby union would eventually embrace professionalism, is also something that was clear to the most far-sighted observers even in the 1970s.

Given the book's influence it is therefore somewhat surprising that, with the exception of Douglas Reid's 1988 article on Dunning and Sheard's account of folk football, there has been very little historical analysis or criticism of the book. [2] This essay hopes to redress the balance slightly by taking a fresh look at the work and its derivatives in *Sports Histories*, focusing on the historical method employed by the authors.

In particular, this review will look at on three inter-related problems that face historians and sociologists when examining the history of the football codes: the problem of hindsight (history viewed with direct and perpetual reference to the present), the problem of progress (the idea that history proceeds in a linear fashion) and the problem of perspective (understanding the contemporary context in which historical events took place). This will be done by looking at two central sections of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* which deal with crucial bifurcations: the origins of the split between rugby and soccer and the question of levels of violence in northern rugby at the time of the 1895 split. In doing this, the article seeks to argue that the historiographical shortcomings of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* are ultimately the result of the underlying assumptions of Norbert Elias's theory of the 'civilizing process', a theory of which all of the authors involved in these two books are committed supporters.

Eton-Rugby rivalry and the origins of soccer and rugby

A central claim of both *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* and Eric Dunning and Graham Curry's *Sports Histories* chapter 'Public schools, status rivalry and the development of football' is that the split between the association and rugby codes of football was 'set in motion principally by Eton-Rugby rivalry in the 1840s' (*Sports Histories* [*SH*], p. 47). However, this claim is based purely on a series of assumptions and suppositions:

> Given the intense status rivalry between schools in that period, it must have incensed the boys at Eton to have their thunder stolen by an obscure, Midlands establishment which had only recently become a public school. They considered their own to be the leading public school in *all* respects. By placing an absolute taboo on the use of hands in their version of football and decreeing that goals could only be scored under the height of the 'goal sticks', they were, one can suggest, attempting to assert their leadership of public schools and put the 'upstart' Rugbeians in their place. (*BGP*, p.86)

The problem with this assertion is that the authors have never been able to produce any evidence to support the existence of such a unique and specific rivalry between Eton and Rugby. Eton's major rival was Harrow school, as reflected in the annual Eton-Harrow cricket and rowing matches, which by the 1840s were major events in the upper-class social calendar. If a similar rivalry with Rugby existed in football, it would also have been expressed by Etonians in other spheres and activities. Yet no one who supports the Curry, Dunning and Sheard thesis has ever found factual confirmation of this rivalry.

It has been suggested by supporters of the thesis that the visit of Queen Adelaide to Rugby school in 1839 heightened Etonian rivalry towards the Midlands 'upstart'. [3]But this ignores the fact that royal visits to Eton were regular and well-publicized events. Her husband, William IV, had made one of his many visits to the school to watch a rowing contest in 1837 shortly before his death from pneumonia, causing many boys to believe his visit had caused his death. His father, George III, had said of himself 'I was ever an Etonian, even from my cradle'. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited the school in 1841 and 1844 and donated £500 to new school buildings. Viewed in this context, a solitary visit to Rugby school by the widow of William IV was not something that would concern even the most status-sensitive Etonian. [4]

How different were the Eton and Rugby variations of football at that time? There is a great danger of assuming that today's clear demarcation between soccer and the rugby codes is applicable to the nineteenth century. But, contrary to Dunning and Sheard's original claim that Eton placed 'an absolute taboo on the use of hands (*BGP*, p 86), Eton football did originally allow the use of hands to stop the ball (as Graham Curry himself has pointed out). And, although Rugby school football rules allowed carrying the ball, the game was still predominantly a kicking game, as the description of the game in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* suggests. Play was dominated by the scrum and the usual tactic was to push the scrum as far as possible before heeling the ball out to a half-back to kick for touch or, if close enough, for goal. Passing between players was very rare indeed. Matches were decided only by goals scored.

Although it would have been a matter of school pride for public schoolboys to believe that their school's form of football was unique, the reality was that the similarities were greater than the differences. The variations between Eton and Rugby rules, which are held by Dunning and Sheard to be indicators of fundamental status difference, were no greater or smaller than those of other schools. *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* claims that Rugby school rules' 'distinctive features such as an oval ball, "H"-shaped goals, scoring above the cross bar, and points for tries as well as goals' were acquired between 1825 and 1850 (*BGP*, p. 52).

In fact, the shape of the ball was not mentioned in the original Rugby school rules (and the Rugby Football Union (RFU) rules only specified an oval ball in 1892), and the shape of the ball used in Harrow rules football, similar to a cushion, was as distinctive, if not more so, than that of Rugby. Eton's ball was much smaller than the ball subsequently used by FA clubs. And, as a glance at contemporary illustrations will show, the shape of early rugby and association balls was surprisingly similar to modern eyes.

And although Rugby goalposts differed from Eton's, so did those of the FA – the goalposts specified in the first set of Football Association rules did not have a crossbar. Tries had no value at all until 1886, being merely the opportunity for a team to have a free kick at goal. Even the scrum, seen as a unique feature of the rugby codes today, had its equivalents in, for example, Eton's 'bully' and Winchester's 'hot'.

Perhaps most importantly, handling the ball – seen today as a fundamental mark of the rugby codes – was common to all codes of football. Rule twenty-two of the 1847 Eton rules allowed use of the hands to stop the ball. Rule eight of the Cambridge rules of 1848 allowed a player to catch the ball directly from a kick and also to use his hands to stop the ball. Rule eight of the original FA rules of 1863 allowed a player to catch the ball and kick it without challenge, similar to the 'mark' in rugby or Victorian Rules in Australia, as did rule three of the Sheffield Association rules of 1857, which also allowed pushing or hitting the ball with the hand. The difference between these and Rugby school rules was not handling the ball, but running with it in the hands, or 'running in' as it was called in the original Rugby school rules of 1845. But even in Rugby rules, the ball could only be carried if it had been caught on the full and could not be picked up from the ground. [5]

Moreover, if we look at how contemporary commentators viewed the Eton code and its relationship to the FA rules, and indeed the Cambridge University rules, we find no evidence to support Dunning and Sheard. The 1868 edition of C.W. Alcock's *Football Annual* carried an article, 'The Chief Points of Difference of the Various Codes', detailing the manifold rule differences of the football codes, which carried no suggestion that the Eton and FA rules were similar or related. A description of the Eton game by an Old Etonian published in 1892 highlights just how different it was from soccer:

> The goals are both low and narrow, being only seven feet high and eleven feet broad, under which the ball must pass. Consequently there is no need of a regular goal-keeper, though the third behind is called 'goals'. The ball is round, made like an Association ball, but very much smaller and lighter. The proper number of players is eleven-a-side, but this number in ordinary games is often largely increased without spoiling the fun. There are eight forwards and only three behinds. . . . The bully [consisting of four forwards from either side] is formed at the beginning of the game, at half-time, and, whenever the ball goes out at the side, opposite the place where it crossed the side-line and half-way to the middle of the ground; in certain cases a bully is the penalty for the infringement of a rule. . . . The great principle of the game is to keep the forwards together, backing-up and on the ball.

> Consequently no player is allowed to touch the ball or to charge the behinds, or in any way to assist his own side or obstruct his adversaries if he is either 'sneaking' or 'cornering'. He is sneaking if he is behind the main body of his adversaries, and the ball is kicked to him or in front of him from behind him; he is cornering when he is away from the ball, and at the side of and apart from the rest of players. The penalty for sneaking is a free kick; for cornering, a bully. Sneaking, it will be seen, roughly corresponds to off-side under Rugby Union rules, but with this exception, that the whole body of the forwards are not put out of action by the fact that the ball is kicked to them by one of their own behinds, but may charge under his kick. [6]

No wonder that Eton schoolboys familiar with modern soccer bemoaned the fact that their school football was *not* like that played under FA rules. As the novelist Henry Green remembered, looking back on his time at Eton before World War One: 'We played a medieval football in no way like any modern game except that we needed a ball and goalposts. It was a miserable substitute for soccer.' [7]And, from a contemporary perspective, one must ask why, if the supporters of Eton football were the dominant force in the codification of Cambridge University and FA rules, did Etonian old boys at Cambridge form a club to play football under Eton rules in 1856? The 'Eton Club, Cambridge' continued well after the formation of the FA, and as late as the1867–8 season played nine games against a variety of school and old-boy teams. [8]

The fluidity of the various codes of football at this time can also be seen if we look at the example of Victorian (later Australian) Rules football. Its original rules predate those of the FA and RFU and appear to be a conscious mixture of Cambridge University rules and Rugby school rules. The key formulators of the game's first set of rules in 1859 in Melbourne were W.J. Hammersley and J.B. Thompson from Trinity College, Cambridge, T.H. Smith of Trinity College, Dublin, where Rugby rules were played, and the old Rugbeian Tom Wills. In some ways the rules resembled the first FA rules in that hacking was not allowed. In others, such as the fact that the ball could not be picked up from the ground but could only be handled if caught on the full or on the first bounce, they resembled Rugby rules. As Geoffrey Blainey and Gillian Hibbins have demonstrated, however, Australians generally thought that they were playing a version of the game played at Rugby and in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, despite the fact that running with the ball was explicitly outlawed in the 1860 version of the Melbourne rules. [9]

All of these examples demonstrate that the similarities between the various codes of football in the mid-nineteenth century were far greater than their differences. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that they

appear to be qualitatively different forms of football. Even the belief that soccer and rugby could be easily divided into 'dribbling' and 'handling' codes in the middle years of the 1800s is misleading. Not only did early soccer rules allow some use of the hands for outfield players, but dribbling the ball was a highly prized skill among rugby forwards. One of the unfounded hopes of the leaders of the Northern Union in the early 1900s was that the reduction in the number of forwards from eight to six would help to encourage more dribbling. As late as the inter-war years it was common for the cry of 'feet Scotland, feet' to be heard in international rugby union matches as an encouragement to the Scots' forwards to dribble the ball.

The similarities between the early codes of football is also illustrated by the ease with which clubs switched from rugby to soccer in the 1870s. Preston North End and Burnley moved from rugby to soccer in 1881 without difficulty. Many clubs played both codes in the 1870s, as well as hybrid or modified rules, despite being members of either the FA or the RFU. Even the Sheffield Association played rugby-type games against Leeds and Manchester in the 1860s. William Hutchinson, the founder of the Hull football club, said that 'we played any mortal code possible with other clubs away from home so long as we could get a game of some sort'. [10] The relative indeterminacy of the rules that were played can also be seen in the example of Bramham College, a small private school in Yorkshire. The college appears to have been the first club in Yorkshire to join the FA but it had its own rules which forbade carrying the ball but allowed bouncing it (two years before it was introduced into Victorian Rules). Nevertheless, in adult life, its pupils were instrumental in founding rugby-playing clubs in Yorkshire in the 1860s and 1870s. [11]

So why and when did the two codes diverge from each other? Fundamentally this was determined by the growing social importance of football in the 1870s, as reflected in, and stimulated by, the emergence of cup competitions. Football started to become a means by which young men could represent their city, town, village, parish, factory or street. And for that to happen in an organized and regular way, a common set of rules with which to play against one's local rivals was required. This was highlighted by Sam Duckitt, the founder of the Halifax football club:

> We saw reports in the papers of football matches being played at Leeds, Bradford and elsewhere, and we thought that Halifax ought to have a club also. . . . We were absolutely unacquainted with the rules of either Rugby or Association. Of course, when we did commence to play, we fell in at once with the prevailing Rugby rules [in Yorkshire]. [12]

A similar phenomenon can be seen in areas where association rules were hegemonic. The growth of cup, and later league, competitions was crucial in fuelling this civic rivalry and led to the divisions between the codes hardening. In short, it was only when football acquired a significant role in society as a whole – and not during the essentially intra-public school debates of the early 1860s – that the bifurcation of football into association and rugby codes could be definitively have said to have happened.

The schematic separation between Eton and Rugby schools' football and the assumption that this foreshadows the split between the FA and the RFU is therefore simply not supported by the facts. But there are also methodological problems which underpin this error. And those are the problems of using hindsight and viewing history as a form of teleological progression. By taking modern soccer and rugby as their starting point, Dunning, Sheard and Curry pick out those elements of mid-nineteenth century football that can be classified in relation to the modern versions. Thus less handling leads to soccer, more handling to rugby. This teleological view of history causes them to emphasize the differences and downplay the similarities of the early football codes in order to fit the template of modern soccer and rugby. Despite rightly attacking the William Webb Ellis story of rugby's origins as a myth, they aim ultimately to discover the 'true source' of modern soccer or rugby, in an unintended echo of Matthew Bloxam's quest to find the originator of rugby football. Just as Bloxam drew a line from Webb Ellis to contemporary rugby, Dunning and Curry's work seeks to draw a straight line from the Eton football rules of 1847 to today's multi-billion-pound soccer industry. And in doing so, they fall into exactly the same trap as Bloxam by making an assertion about the past for which no contemporary account or evidence can be found. In historiographical terms, this is the football equivalent of the Whig theory of history, in which the links of causation have conveniently come together in the present day to present us with an unbroken chain of progress.

Violence and rugby in the 1895 split

If the discussion on the origins of soccer and rugby presents us with an example of the problems inherent in using hindsight in history, Dunning and Sheard's examination of the supposedly high levels of violence in northern rugby in the 1890s and 1900s highlights a failure to understand the importance of context in examining historical events. And like the speculation about Eton-Rugby rivalry, their assertions are similarly

undermined by a lack of evidence. The issue of violence in early rugby league is for Dunning and Sheard a subject 'which merits special consideration'. *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* highlights three issues which underline the authors' belief that rugby league was an especially violent code of football: the introduction of the 'half-back rule', the number of deaths in Yorkshire rugby in the 1890s, and the withdrawal of insurance cover from the Northern Union (NU) in 1910. Each is worth exploring in detail.

1. The 'half-back rule'

Dunning and Sheard claim that reports of the first annual general meeting of the Northern Union 'shows that the NU authorities believed the roughness of rugby league to be one of its most problematic aspects' (*GBP*, p. 187) and that it introduced 'the half-back rule' to reduce violent play. In fact, the meeting was not an AGM but a special meeting held in December 1895 to discuss rule changes, and it introduced a rule which specified that the non-feeding scrum-half could not advance beyond the back row of his own forwards before the ball had come out of the scrum. The rule demonstrated, say Dunning and Sheard, that the game's authorities 'believed that the violence of rugby league was dysfunctional for the maintenance of spectator support' (*GBP*, p. 187).

But this rule change was made to an existing RFU rule, and was an attempt by the NU to clean up *rugby union rules*, under which the new organization was still playing. Under rugby union scrummage rules the scrum-half could effectively stand next to his opposing number while waiting for the ball to emerge from the back of the scrum. Almost inevitably this led to a confrontations between scrum-halves, which would often involve the back row of the forwards, making it very difficult to pass the ball away from the scrum quickly and cleanly. Although the introduction of the half-back rule did reduce opportunities for violence at the scrum, its main purpose was to open up play and allow the ball to be passed away from the scrum to the stand-off half and the three-quarters much more rapidly. Thus the primary aim was not to reduce violence in rugby league, as Dunning and Sheard claim, but to reduce the opportunities for violence and stifling play which the then current rugby union rules allowed. Indeed, this view is confirmed by no less an authority than William Cail, a former president of the RFU who in 1902 proposed that rugby union should adopt the rule in order to 'popularize' its game and make it more attractive in the face of threats from soccer and the NU. [13]

As to the claim that the NU authorities thought that violence in their sport was especially problematic, this is contradicted by the NU's founding president and chief spokesman, Harry Waller. Speaking after the 1897 Challenge Cup final, he contrasted the forty-five NU players who had been reported by referees for violent play that season with the 150 reported for violence in rugby union in Yorkshire alone during the same period – 'not bad for uneducated working man players,' he commented. To further aid the comparison he noted that the NU had 150 clubs in membership at the time, probably slightly more than the Yorkshire Rugby Union. [14]

2. Deaths in Yorkshire rugby

Perhaps the most famous plank of Dunning and Sheard's argument that rugby league was 'physically dangerous' is their citing of data showing that seventy-one players lost their lives playing rugby union in Yorkshire between 1890 and 1893, alongside another 366 unfortunate souls who broke legs, arms and collarbones or sustained other injuries. It is based on a short passage that Ken Sheard found in the *Wakefield Express* of 8 April 1893 that reads: 'The following is a table showing the number of football casualties during the season as reported in the newspapers, together with a summary of the results for the season just closing and for the two preceding seasons.' It is followed by the chart that appears on p. 187 of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*.

As we can see, it makes no reference to Yorkshire. Nor does it make any reference to rugby. Yet this data is introduced by Dunning and Sheard as 'some figures on the deaths and injuries incurred in Yorkshire rugby prior to the "split" that can serve to introduce the discussion' on 'the relationship between the roughness of Northern Union football and its spectator appeal' (*GBP*, p. 187).

Sadly these figures are so flawed that they do not pass the test of serious evidence. The *Wakefield Express* copied them directly from a series of articles entitled 'The Butcher's Bill' which had appeared in W.T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* over the previous three years. Stead's newspaper was pursuing a campaign against 'the dangers of football', but the figures were widely considered to be unreliable, so much so that a disclaimer was added to the *Gazette*'s 1892 article stating that 'neither we nor the author can vouch personally for the accuracy of the following statements'. [15] The articles listed 'football accidents' across the whole of the British Isles, plus some in Australia, and included both association and rugby from schoolboy to international level. The lists were random and unsystematic

– an unnamed Blackburn Rovers player 'was hurt' in a November 1891 match while a death due to peritonitis was 'caused probably by a kick on the football field'. An accident at a match in Warriston was recorded although 'the nature of which was not stated'. [16]

In the new edition of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* Dunning and Sheard now admit that these figures were 'a serious mistake' (*GBP*, p. 248). However, they go on to argue that 'they were not too wide of the mark' and cite statistics that appeared in the *Lancet* in the 1890s which claim that ninety-six players were killed playing football between 1891 and 1899. [17]

In fact, the evidence presented by the *Lancet* simply compounds Dunning and Sheard's original error. As with the *Pall Mall Gazette* these figures do not refer to rugby in Yorkshire. They cover both association and rugby football. Like the *Pall Mall Gazette* and its original statistics, the *Lancet* itself is sceptical of their accuracy: 'We have made no special effort to obtain a complete roll of the casualties but that we have simply recorded such as we have chanced to come across in the columns of our contemporaries'. [18] And they bear absolutely no relationship to Dunning and Sheard's claims about rugby league.

Despite this, Dunning and Sheard claim that the *Lancet* data are 'supportive' of their argument that 'in late nineteenth century Britain, football, especially the Rugby form, was viewed as a hazardous activity' (*GBP*, p. 249). But it is not supportive at all, because the *Lancet* drew precisely the opposite conclusion to Dunning and Sheard. It argued that *soccer* was the most dangerous of the football codes. In 1894 it devoted a major article to the subject, examining both codes in detail, and came to the conclusion that:

> it is our opinion that Association, at first sight a tame game compared with the other, is possibly more perilous than Rugby Union; and that its modern developments, though in many ways so similar, are more certainly towards danger than are the developments in the tactics of the older branch. [19]

It reviewed the subject again in 1907, following the split in rugby and the massive expansion in the popularity of soccer. It saw no reason to change its opinion: 'Everything seems to show that the degree of danger incurred by players is greater in the dribbling than in the carrying game.' [20]

Thus a critical examination of the sources provided for rugby-related deaths in Yorkshire demonstrates that Dunning and Sheard's contentions are not grounded in historically reliable evidence. [21]

3. Withdrawal of players' insurance

Dunning and Sheard go on to claim that further evidence 'that rugby league remained physically dangerous comes from the fact that, in 1910, the Essex and Suffolk Insurance Company refused to continue insuring players' (*GBP*, p. 187).

In fact this had nothing to do with violence in the game but was a consequence of the provisions of the 1906 Workmen's Compensation Act. The act, which among other things extended compensation for injuries sustained at work to professional soccer and rugby footballers, significantly increased the potential benefits payable to employees injured at work. The small pool of professional football clubs of both codes meant that insurance companies put themselves at significant risk if faced with paying compensation out on an extensive scale, thus making them wary of underwriting football insurance. To counter the difficulties of finding affordable insurance, the Football League, along with the Southern League and the Scottish Football League, formed the Football Mutual Insurance Federation (FMIF) in 1907. The reluctance of the insurance companies to insure footballers was confirmed to some extent by the fact that in the 1910–11 season the FMIF made a loss of £200, leading to the Football League starting a new insurance federation in 1912. [22]

The minutes of the Northern Union meeting at which the insurance problem was discussed, which are cited in *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, note the similar experiences of the soccer authorities:

> The Secretary reported that the Essex & Suffolk Insurance Company refuse to continue Football Insurance, and that he could not get any of the strong offices to take it up. The question of forming a Mutual Insurance Company to take over the risks was suggested, and it was decided to leave the matter in the hands of the Emergency Committee, the Secretary in the meantime to get in touch with Mr J. Bentley [a president of the Football League and vice-president of the FA], with respect to the Mutual Insurance Company formed by the Association League. [23]

This is indeed what happened, and a mutual insurance scheme was set up by the NU later that month. As an indication of the levels of payments made to injured players, it is worth examining how much was actually paid out in insurance claims at this time. In the three years before Essex and Suffolk stopped insuring rugby league players, total sums of £17, £12 6s and £18 8s 4d were paid to injured players, amounts which hardly suggest huge numbers of players being laid low by on-field acts of violence. [24]

Indeed, when examined properly, none of the examples used by Dunning and Sheard indicate an unusually large of amount of violence in rugby league. While it is undoubtedly true that the game could be violent, there is no evidence to suggest that it was more violent than any other code of football. Dunning and Sheard's attempts to find evidence to support their thesis have led them to misunderstand a number of key aspects of the history of the football codes in the context of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Whose civilization? Whose history?

Indeed, using Dunning and Sheard's theory of the 'civilizing process', one could easily argue that the NU authorities' rule changes were part of a process of civilizing rugby union. When one takes into account the move to thirteen players per side and the abolition of the dangerous rucks and mauls in favour of the more orderly playing of the ball after a tackle, there appears to be a very strong case in favour of the argument that the abandonment of rugby union rules and the evolution of the distinctive rugby league rules represented the creation of a more civilized form of rugby.

However, there is a problem at the heart of the theory of the 'civilizing process' which prevents the authors from making this argument. And that is the belief that 'de-civilizing' behaviour necessarily comes from the working classes and other groups at the bottom of the social order. In the Eliasian worldview, the 'civilizing process' always flows downwards from the upper classes. Thus the predominantly working-class Northern Union form of rugby is held to be more violent than rugby union. Indeed, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* does not seriously discuss the question of violence in rugby union in the twentieth century, other than to claim the sport is civilized because it has complex rules, penalties, referees and a governing body (*GBP*, p. 233). It even goes so far as to dismiss concerns about violence in the game in the 1970s, claiming that they 'have all the trappings of a moral panic' and that 'the nature and extent of the violence appear to be exaggerated' (*GBP*, p. 234) without offering any factual evidence for this view. Given the revelations about the violence in international rugby union that emerged during the period in which the book was written (especially the notorious 1974 British Lions tour to South Africa, in which the British side prepared the call '99' to start an all-in brawl, and the no less violent 1975 England tour of Australia), one would expect a little more serious consideration of the matter. This is especially so when one considers that the question of violence is as

integral to union as it is to league, particularly in the international context, as can be seen, for example, in the 1908 Wallaby tour, the expulsion of France from the Five Nations in 1931, and the debate on New Zealand rucking methods in the inter-war years.

This one-sided view of civilization and violence can also be seen in the discussion on football hooliganism that comes at the end of the book. Identifying football hooligans as working class, Dunning and Sheard claim that 'such groups have been subjected to civilizing pressures externally, e.g. from the higher classes and the state' (*GBP*, p. 242). The implication that opposition to gang violence comes only from the upper classes and the state is to ignore the forces for social progress that have historically existed within working-class communities: the trade unions, political parties, tenants' organizations, cooperative societies, youth clubs and so on. Indeed for many working-class people, especially those whose skins are not white, much of the violence they experience comes from the state in the form of the police, a supposed agency of the 'civilizing process'.

At the sporting level it also ignores the fact that middle-class football players of both codes were often seen as being more violent by their working-class opponents. Certainly the Corinthians played a very robust style of soccer that involved vigorous use of the shoulder charge, a feature that often unsettled their professional opponents. Jim Sullivan and Gus Risman, who both played league and union rugby, argued that league was a cleaner and less violent form of rugby. And as Douglas Reid has pointed out, many of the calls to reform folk football in the first half of the nineteenth century came from working-class Methodists and Chartists. [25]

There are also dangers in accepting the claims of those who were engaged in attempting to 'civilize' the working classes. For example, the campaigns to ban animal-baiting and fighting sports in the early nineteenth century were usually directed almost entirely against the working class and its sports. One of the most common criticisms of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, founded in 1824, was that it did nothing to oppose upper-class sports such as hunting and shooting – and indeed, many of the RSPCA's most prominent supporters were huntsmen. As with amateurism later in the century, 'civilized behaviour' was something that the upper classes defined for the working classes but which they did not necessarily apply to themselves.

The inbuilt assumption that 'civilized' behaviour is generated by the upper classes can also be seen in Dominic Malcolm's essay, 'Cricket and de-civilizing processes in the imperial game', in *Sports Histories*. He uses the example of the 1932–3 'bodyline' tour of the MCC to Australia and

the controversy over the all-conquering West Indian pace attack of the 1970s and 1980s to illustrate how so-called 'de-civilizing spurts' can interrupt the 'civilizing process'. He argues that bodyline bowling tactics, in which the England fast bowlers were told by English captain Douglas Jardine to bowl at the bodies of the Australian batsmen, were the result of 'a commingling of class cultures characteristic of an equalizing of power chances in the English game' (*SH*, p. 80). The notion that there was any semblance of 'equalized power chances' between amateur cricketers and working-class professionals in England in the 1930s is just plain daft; the master-servant relationship was as rigid in the inter-war years as it had ever been. [26] But the idea that bodyline tactics were the result of Jardine's 'commingling' with working-class culture is a manifestation of the Eliasians' belief that ruling classes are the source of 'civilizing processes' and the working classes are the source of 'de-civilizing' processes. The suggestion that Jardine could only have developed the bodyline tactic as a result of this 'commingling' is to forget that men of his class were trained by their public schools and universities to govern and defend an empire, a duty which required them to act with lethal violence against their subjects as and when necessary. He would not have needed to 'commingle' with the former miner Harold Larwood to understand the concept of winning by fair means or foul.

This inherent tendency to lay the blame for violence at the door of those opposed to the dominant classes in society can also be seen in the article's discussion of West Indian fast bowling in the 1970s and 1980s. It argues that increasing violence in cricket was caused by a 'functional democratization' of the game that 'necessarily involves a change in the established pattern of dominance and submission' (*SH*, p. 86). But despite correctly pointing out that much of the opposition to captain Clive Lloyd's four-man pace attack was motivated by simple racism, the article ends up echoing the complaints of the MCC's backwoodsmen by labelling the period of West Indian domination as a so-called 'de-civilizing' spurt. The unwitting implication of the theory is of course that those who campaigned against the West Indies' tactics were defending 'civilized' norms. Again, the idea that it is those at the bottom of the social order who are responsible for 'de-civilizing' society comes to the fore.

This unspoken inference of Elias's theory of the 'civilizing process' – that the lower classes and oppressed racial groups are somehow less 'civilized' than their rulers – is not addressed by any of the authors in these two books. The only hint that it may have been considered is in Ken Sheard's interesting article on the increased risks of modern boxing in *Sports Histories*, in which he refers to 'non-evaluative ideas about

civilizing processes' (*SH*, p. 23). But, of course, 'civilized' is such a hugely value-laden term – and, moreover, one that has historically been used to justify the subjugation of those deemed to be 'uncivilized' by their rulers – that it must necessarily be evaluated whenever it is used.

Indeed, when interrogated in this manner the term 'civilizing process' carries with it many of the implications of the phrase 'civilizing mission' employed by supporters of various Western imperialisms to justify colonialism, not least the idea that the Western ruling classes are more civilized than those subject to their rule. These ideas continually seep into the arguments of the proponents of the 'civilizing process', especially when seeking to defend, against substantial evidence to the contrary, the notion that contemporary society is becoming more civilized. Thus Ken Sheard, in a lone attempt in *Sports Histories* to explore the wider implications of the theory, contends that 'it is possible to argue' that 'modern warfare is more "civilized" than it used to be, in that war is now conducted from a distance and more often than not involves bombs and missiles rather than the face-to-face combat of a previous era' (*SH*, p. 24). How the industrially-organized, indiscriminate killing of civilians by bombs and missiles can be said to be 'civilized' in any shape or form beggars belief.

But if we leave aside these unappetizing political implications, the 'civilizing process' has a familiar historiographical ring to it. At root, it is a variation of the Whig theory of history, which saw the development of British society as progressing from tyranny to liberty, beginning with the defeat of the Stuart monarchy in the seventeenth century and moving, albeit with one or two 'de-progressive' setbacks along the way, to the fully developed parliamentary democracy of today. In the hands of its supporters, the Whig theory made it easy to identify those who helped this march of liberty and those who hindered it. Elias's ideas about history in many ways belong to that tradition. As Ken Sheard explains in *Sports Histories*, Elias's view of the 'civilizing process' connected the '"parliamentarization" of political conflict' to 'the end of this cycle of violence [in eighteenth century Britain]' (*SH*, p. 20). Elias's ideas are essentially a combination of Whig theory combined with a quasi-Hegelian idea of a *Weltgeist*, albeit one in which he replaced Hegel's belief that world history was based on the progress of the consciousness of freedom with the idea that it was based on the advance of 'civilized' behaviour.

Like the advocates of the Whig theory, supporters of the 'civilizing process' theory also use history as a form of teleology, using the perspective of the present to project back on to the past today's divisions between the football codes. And like the Whig theoreticians, they also imply that history proceeds according to a particular conception of

progress, whether it is the development of soccer and rugby into the sports we know today or of society towards 'civilized' behaviour. [27] But, perhaps most importantly, these misconceptions undermine their claim to historical accuracy. As we have seen, the explanation of the split between soccer and rugby presented in *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* and *Sports Histories* rests on a series of assumptions for which there is no factual evidence. And their analysis of violence in the early years of the Northern Union is based on a serious misreading of source materials and misunderstanding of historical context.

It is a traditional complaint of sociologists that historians pay little or no attention to theory. To some extent there is truth in this criticism, but in the final analysis any theory must be measured by its ability to explain and interpret reality. And as these two books demonstrate, despite being a thought-provoking and stimulating hypothesis, ultimately the theory of the 'civilizing process' fails to pass the test of the historical record.

Notes

[1] I am grateful to Neil Carter, Martin Johnes and Tony Mason for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

[2] Douglas Reid, 'Folk-football the aristocracy and cultural change: A critique of Dunning and Sheard', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5 (2) (September 1988).

[3] See, for example, Eric Dunning, 'The origins of modern football and the public school ethos', in B. Simon and I. Bradley (eds.) *The Victorian Public School* (Dublin, 1975), p. 175.

[4] For details of the royal involvement with Eton, see Tim Card, *Eton established. A history from 1440 to 1860* (London, 2001), pp. 156, 108, 155 and 149.

[5] For Eton see Eric Dunning and Graham Curry, 'Public schools, status rivalry and the development of football', in Eric Dunning, Dominic Malcolm and Ivan Waddington (eds.) *Sports Histories: Figurational Studies of the Development of Modern Sports* (London, 2004), p. 44. For the other examples, see the useful collection of the original rules of many of the early forms of football at http://www.innotts.co.uk/soccer/histrule.htm

[6] S.R. James, 'Eton Football' in Rev. Frank Marshall (ed.), *Football, The Rugby Union Game*, 2nd edn (London, 1894), pp. 32–3.

[7] Henry Green, *Pack My Bag* (London, 1940; new edn, 1952), p. 92.

[8] See C.W. Alcock (ed.), *Football Annual* (London, 1868), pp. 19 and 42.

[9] For the 1859 and 1860 rules of Victorian football, see Geoffrey Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian football*, 2nd edn (Melbourne, 2003), pp. 222–4. For the influence of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in Melbourne, see pp. 29–30. The best discussion of the origin of Victorian Rules can be found in G.M. Hibbins, 'The Cambridge connection: The English origins of Australian Rules football' in J.A. Mangan (ed.) *The Cultural Bond. Sport, Empire, Society* (London, 1993).

[10] *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 1 Dec. 1900.
[11] For Bramham College rules, see the *Bramham College Magazine*, Nov. 1864, p. 182. The school is listed as a member of the FA in the *Football Annual* of 1870.
[12] *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 9 Feb. 1901.
[13] For Cail, see the *Yorkshire Post*, 10 Feb. 1902. The Yorkshire Rugby Union also made the same proposal in 1898 (*Yorkshire Post*, 10 Oct. 1898).
[14] *Yorkshire Post*, 22 April 1897.
[15] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 March 1892. The *Yorkshire Post*, 6 April 1891, criticized these figures, saying that 'the list is inaccurate in more than one instance,' as did the arch-opponent of working-class professionalism H.H. Almond in 'Football as a moral agent', *Nineteenth Century*, 34 (1893).
[16] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 March 1891 and 23 March 1892.
[17] Unfortunately, these data are incorrectly referenced in the new edition of *Barbarians, Gentleman and Players*. It is referenced as 'Sheard, 1998, p. 77' but this does not match any of the works cited in the bibliography. I have therefore been unable to check the precise references.
[18] *Lancet*, 24 March 1894, p. 765.
[19] Ibid., p. 766.
[20] *Lancet*, 16 Nov. 1907, p. 1402.
[21] For an attempt at a comprehensive list of rugby-related deaths in Yorkshire under rugby union and rugby league rules, see *Rugby's Great Spilt* (London, 1998), pp. 241 and 248.
[22] On the insurance difficulties of soccer, see *Athletic News*, 25 Sept. 1911, and Matthew Taylor, '"Proud Preston" A history of the Football League 1900–39' (unpublished PhD thesis, De Montfort University, 1997), pp. 229–30.
[23] NU General Committee minutes, 9 Aug. 1910. The insurance scheme was set up on 29 August.
[24] Figures taken from Northern Rugby Football Union, Report and Balance Sheet, years ending 1 June 1908, 1 June 1909 and 1 June 1910.
[25] On soccer, see, for example, *Athletic News*, 13 Nov. 1917, or the memoir of Lord Kinnaird in Terence Delaney's *A Century of Soccer* (London, 1965), p. 37. On rugby, see Gus Risman, *Rugby Renegade* (London, 1958), p. 123; Reid, 'Folk-football', p. 234.
[26] See, for example, Jack Williams, *Cricket and England, a social and cultural history of cricket in England between the wars* (London, 1999).
[27] For a critique of teleological approaches to the history of sport see Nancy Struna, 'Reframing the direction of change in the history of sport', *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 18 (4) (Dec. 2001), pp. 1–15.