Figurational/process-sociological reflections on sport and globalization: some conceptual-theoretical observations with special reference to the ‘soccer’ form of football

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Abstract: This paper falls into three parts. The first involves a general conceptual-theoretical discussion of globalization and some examples from the realm of global sport; the second involves a discussion of the development and global spread of ‘soccer’; and the third involves a discussion of some sporting and/or sport-associated pathologies. Throughout, the discussion uses the figurational/process-sociological approach developed by Norbert Elias. Expressed simply, the essay is fundamentally an exercise in process- and relational sociology.

‘Soccer’ – ‘Association Football’ to give the game its proper name – has become the world’s most popular team-sport. It emerged in the middle and latter parts of the 19th century in Britain and Ireland and spread from thence rapidly throughout the world. The paper analyses this process and finishes with a discussion of: the anomie experienced by many top-level sports-persons; the sports-related sex scandals reported mainly in the tabloid press; and finally, the continuing world-wide scourge of ‘soccer hooliganism’.

Keywords: globalization, process and figurational sociology, football, spread of sport.

Part I

This paper falls into three distinct, sometimes only loosely connected parts: in the first, I discuss some conceptual-theoretical issues associated with processes of globalization; in the second, I deal more concretely with the globalization of the ‘soccer’ form of football, the world’s most popular and successful team-sport up to now; and in the third, I examine some of the pathologies associated with the globalization of sport.

If one seeks to approach the complex or configuration of issues associated with globalization and the globalization of sport from a figurational or process-sociological standpoint, there are at least five principal requirements, namely:

1. sport and its social contexts have to be viewed as processes rather than as steady-states. That is, care has to be taken to avoid the fallacy of what Elias (1978a) called *Zustandsreduction*, of reducing processes to states. Processes also have to be explained by reference to other processes;
2. the history and development of sport as well as processes of globalization have to be viewed from a long-term perspective, from the standpoint of what Giddens (1984) calls ‘the longue durée’;
3. one’s principal focus has to be on emergent or developing chains and networks of interdependence both within sport and as they impinge on it. The varying balances between centrifugal and centripetal pressures to which interdependency chains of differing lengths and degrees of intensity are conducive, to-
gether with the corresponding levels and forms of state-formation, also have to be central foci;

4. one has to seek to distinguish among those groups and institutions which benefit and those which lose out in the various stages of such a process. Another way of putting it would be to say that one has to be sensitive to the ways in which emergent global integration and institutions affect the relative power-chances and life-chances of sports-related groups, leading over time to forms of re-classification among them in Durkheim’s (1897) sense;

5. one has to try to avoid natiocentrism and what one might call ‘Eurocentrism’ or ‘Occidentocentrism’ and, instead, view emergent sports figurations in the context of the wider, increasingly global network of interdependency ties in which they are embedded. In particular, while recognizing the parts played by ‘Anglicization’, ‘Europeanization’ and ‘Americanization’ in this connection, one has to seek to trace the roots and consequences of the ‘Asianization’, and above all the ‘Japanization’ and ‘Sinecization’ which appeared to be taking place as we moved from the 19th and 20th centuries into the 21st.

Such an approach involves seeking above all to avoid three recurrent sets of problems: firstly, the static bias found in many conventional sociological paradigms and theories (e.g. Parsons, 1951); secondly, what Elias (1987) called ‘the retreat of sociologists to the present’, i.e. the more or less total separation of sociology from history; and thirdly, the tendency to equate such concepts as ‘society’ and ‘social system’ with the idea of supposedly self-contained nation-states.

It is, I think, a fair bet that most people tend to think of globalization as a fairly recent process, one associated mainly with the development of capitalism in and after the 19th century or perhaps even as recently as since the Second World War. From a figurational/process-sociological standpoint, however, it is better to see what happened in that context as representing only a relatively recent stage in a more deeply rooted and more long-term social process. It is a process which is inherent in the fact that *Homo Sapiens* evolved biologically as a globalizing species dependent far more for survival on learning than on instinctive forms of behaviour, a fact which accounts for the species’s ‘globalization’ in the sense of spreading around and becoming the dominant species in the world. The social stocks of knowledge built up in this connection – knowledge can, of course, be lost as well as gained – include among other things the recorded as well as the unwritten knowledge of how to play the various forms of sports and games and how to construct the balls and other implements used in this connection.

Given the present predilection among sociologists for present-centred or ‘hodiecentric’ thinking (Goudsblom, 1977), it is often forgotten that the nation-state societies of Western Europe became integrated as parts of a single, to a large extent centrally controlled unit at the time of the Roman Empire and continue to bear traces of that experience today. It is usual, of course, to talk Eurocentrically about ‘the Dark Ages’ ensuing when Roman imperial rule broke down in the West in the 5th century AD and to view that period as one of total disintegration, anarchy and disarray. Viewed from a figurational/process-sociological standpoint, however, it is better to re-
member how civilizations, including the Eastern Roman or ‘Byzantine Empire’ continued in the Near, Middle and Far East and to see this local breakdown of dominion by the Roman state as producing, not so much disintegration as the emergence of a new, more conflict-ridden and violent form of integration, together with a shift in the European social order in the balance between centripetal and centrifugal pressures initially in favour of the latter (Elias, 1939b; 1978; 1982). This shift was crucial in laying down structural preconditions for the peculiar dynamism of the West relative to the Near and Far East, that is to say for the long-term processes of hegemonial and elimination struggles and political monopoly-formation that were conducive to the rise of modern nation-states and, correlative, of modern science, industrialization and – most significantly of all in the present context – what Norbert Elias (in Elias & Dunning, 1986) called ‘the sportization of pastimes’. Also involved in the establishment of these preconditions were wars and trading struggles among nation-states and among the dynastic and feudal forms of survival unit which preceded them. Between them, this complex or configuration of processes contributed to and was reciprocally dependent upon the emergent global hegemony of the West, a pattern of global domination which, starting in the 15\textsuperscript{th}, 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries, lasted some three to four centuries and which is only now showing signs of coming to a close with the shift of global power – so far given the retention of military supremacy by the USA, mainly economic power – to the Far East. Indeed, it is possible that what we are witnessing at present are the early stages of processes of ‘Asianization’ or ‘Sinization’. Such processes have not yet, however, impacted noticeably upon sports, which continue largely in their European and American forms.

Writing in 1992, the Dutch sociologist Ruud Stokvis (1992, 112) said of Elias’s and my work on sport that, while he does not totally disagree with us, our approach tends in his view to lead research into matters of violence and its control, whereas more important areas for research, such as the formal organization and standardization (of sport), its diffusion in national societies and throughout the world, its professionalization and commercialization, remain beyond its scope.

This is a rather odd criticism. It ignores the fact that the commercialization, professionalization and diffusion of sport are among the central foci of Dunning and Sheard’s \textit{Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players} (1979) and takes the occurrence of civilizing processes in sport and societies at large for granted, seeing such issues as the formal organization, professionalization and commercialization of sports as issues that can be considered separately from violence and violence-control. It is, however, difficult to see how sports could have been organized nationally and internationally as they are today without the prior occurrence of substantial national unification, processes which empirically involved the development of a modernized transport and communications infrastructure, together with the monopolization of violence under state-control as consequences of what Elias (1939b; 1978; 1982) called ‘hegemonial’ or ‘elimination struggles’, first among contenders for ‘the royal position’ and later, as a consequence of the partial democratization of ‘the means of ruling’, for parliamentarization.
and parliamentary control. Similarly, while the earliest stages in the development of modern capitalism involved the use of express force and violence to a greater extent that tends to be the case nowadays in the more developed societies, it is clear that one of the preconditions for the processes of commercialization and commodification that are occurring today in the world of sports and elsewhere is the existence of pacified social spaces in which:

1. commodity production and distribution can take place regularly and with relatively little disruption most of the time;
2. people have a chance to earn an income sufficient to buy the commodities thus produced; and
3. where people have leisure time and leisure resources and are not forced to devote most of their time and energy simply to staying alive.

In any case, the existence of global rules of sport presupposes at least a degree of non-violent collaboration among the representatives of different nations. International sports bodies were not formed in times of war and international competitions such as the Olympic Games and the soccer and rugby World Cups tend to be suspended at such times. Indeed, they are sometimes even threatened when an escalation of tension between major powers which stops short of actual war takes place. This was shown by the US boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics as a result of the Soviet action in Afghanistan. Finally, the following – rather lengthy – extract from a 1992 newspaper article describing the effects on two Bosnian Olympic athletes shows graphically how modern sport depends fundamentally for its existence on pacified social spaces:

Trapped in Sarajevo, two hapless members of the Bosnian Olympic team are trying to keep up with their training – despite the unsporting distractions of Serbian artillery, sniper fire and malnutrition. Both have qualified for the Olympics, but fear they will not be able to make it to Barcelona because – strange to write this in 1992 – they are besieged. No other long-distance runner in the world has to put up with the fear of being in a sniper’s sights, but Bosnian Muslim Mirsada Buric, 22, is trying not to let it get her down. She still runs past the ruins of the Sarajevo Olympic complex, but her home city is no longer a safe place for exercise. “I have been sniped at and very nearly bombed. I do most of my training by running up and down stairs – that and skipping, she said, speaking through an interpreter on one of the few telephone lines out of the devastated city. She was held prisoner by Serbian forces for 13 days, along with 350 neighbours and family from her village near Sarajevo, which had been overrun. Such is her fame in Sarajevo that they allowed her out to scrounge for food for the others. She was released but is now homeless … The other besieged Olympian is 25 year old Vlado Paragik, a judo champion who has lost nearly nine lbs in weight, simply because he, like everyone else in the city, cannot get enough to eat. His difficulty is that he has to throw competing judo players around later this month, should he get to Spain … His training schedule has been interrupted by serving with a special police force, patrolling the front line, and dodging shells
and bullets. At the start of the fighting, he too was driven from his home; another refugee to add to the statistics. The Serbian gunmen who control the hills that surround Sarajevo have refused to grant Paragik and Busic safe passage; and the UN forces have been unwilling to push the matter. Last Friday an attempt to use a back road to escape the blockade was ‘blown’ when it was discovered by the Serbian forces, who are anxious not to boost the morale of the besieged. Ironically, athletes from Serbia and its ally Montenegro, will have no difficulty competing in Barcelona, despite a United Nations ban on sporting contests with the rump state of Yugoslavia. They will enter as individual competitors, wearing white vests and saluting the Olympic flag.

The argument against Stokvis can be taken further. While sports are not all equally violent intrinsically and the chances for violent interaction beyond the levels allowable by the rules probably tend to be greatest in the physical contact sports such as soccer and rugby and in combat sports such as boxing, all sports are inherently competitive and hence conducive to the arousal of hostile and aggressive feelings. Such feelings can lead to violent outcomes where norms demanding strict self-control over violent impulses have not been deeply internalized by the participants. In a word, it is reasonable to suppose that the level of violence even in non-contact sports is likely to depend, ceteris paribus, on the levels of civilization, firstly of the competitors and, secondly, of the societies (including the social groups such as class and ethnic groupings) to which they belong. It may even be the case, as the research of Richard Sipes (1973) suggests, that the more violent and aggressive a society overall, the greater will be the tendency for its members to favour violent and aggressive sports. Think, for example, of the violence of the Greek and Roman games, especially the latter, and think of the ways in which the tournaments and folk-games of the European middle ages mirrored the violent tenor of life in medieval society at large (Guttmann, 1978; 1986; Elias & Dunning, 1986; Dunning & Sheard, 1979). Indeed, as I hinted earlier, it seems reasonable to suppose that one of the central underlying preconditions for the currently growing popularity and increasing social significance of sports and therefore of the processes of commercialization and commodification that they are interdependently undergoing, is the fact that, in Western Europe and most of the rest of the Western world, we have not experienced a major war domestically for more than 60 years. The key word here, of course, is domestically.

Novelist George Orwell, writing in 1950, perceptively described sport as ‘war minus the shooting’. This is a useful insight but the negative evaluation of sport that it implies does not take sufficiently into account the manifest difference that is involved, say, between the sort of movement of heavily armed groups bent on death and destruction that took place on a world scale between 1939 and 1945 – I am alluding, of course, to the Second World War – and the large-scale movement that regularly takes place around the world today of men – and increasingly of women, too – for purposes of participating in and watching sports events. In fact, one can say that, along with war and religion, sport appears to be one of the most successful means of collective mobilization that humans have so far devised. That is the case because of the combination
of representational and excitement-generating functions it performs (Murphy, Williams & Dunning, 1990). If you like, sport can be said to be in key respects functionally homologous both with religion as conceptualized by Durkheim (1915) and with war. It may even be the case that we are witnessing at present the early stages in a long-term process in which sport is gradually coming partly to replace them both. That is, while no one could seriously contend that sport is an area of life where fundamental theological issues such as the origins of the universe and of life can be addressed, it can

1. provide a central source of meaning and of feelings of continuity for people;
2. act as a focus of collective identification; and
3. offer experiences that are analogous to the excitement generated in primitive religions and primitive war.

Its inherently conflictful and zero-sum character, furthermore, means that sport lends itself readily to ‘we-group’/’they-group’ identifications. The success of sport in these regards is clearly dependent on the fact that, in its modern forms, the physical dangers inherent in any group mobilization for purposes of conflict are minimized by a combination of personal and social controls (Selbstzwänge and Fremdzwänge, Elias, 1939). Of course, the occurrence of football hooliganism – it, too, became a global phenomenon in the second half of the 20th century – provides an indication of the violence-potential that remains inherent in the more ‘civilized’ sports and societies of today. So, too, does the threat posed to major events by terrorist groups. However, in both cases the violence is not principally generated in the sports context per se but instead involves its use by groups whose violent tendencies are generated outside. As such, it can be argued that football hooliganism and sports terrorism both provide a measure of the success of sport, i.e. hooligans and terrorists are attracted to sport on account of its massive global success. Let me turn now to the development of the soccer form of football as the world’s most popular team-sport.

Part II

The sociogenesis and diffusion of “the peoples’ game”: the origins and global spread of the ‘soccer’ form of football

This part of my paper is about “the Peoples’ Game”, not “the People’s Game” that James Walvin wrote about in 1975. This punctuation difference is significant. It is intended to convey the fact that, although Association Football was invented in England in the 19th century, it has since become a global sport, a game of almost all the peoples of the world. In 1966, the journalist Laurence Kitchin (The Listener, 27.10.1966), presciently and, in my opinion, accurately, referred to it as ‘the only global idiom apart from science’. Therein, of course, lies a central part of the social significance of the game. It has become a global and widely shared phenomenon, not simply a national and largely differentiating one. As such, despite the conflicts and tensions that continue to be generated in connection with it and for which it serves as a focus of expression, – it involves a shifting tension-balance between integrating and disintegrating processes – if properly understood and used, it is of potential importance for peace and mutual understanding in our troubled globalizing world.
It is also important to note that, in the course of its development as a global sport, the soccer form of football has become a game of all the peoples in two, partly separable senses: firstly in the sense that it has become an activity participated in directly and spectatorially by people all over the world, to a large extent independently of ‘race’, creed or colour. In saying this, I am making a statement of fact which is not intended to deny that racial and religious tensions remain a serious and continuing blight upon the game; and secondly football has become a game of all the people in the sense that it has become a sport of females as well as males, though not, of course, in equal proportions, a fact which testifies to its remaining largely a male preserve. As I shall suggest later, the fact that soccer continues to be a largely male preserve helps to explain some of the persistent problems that it faces.

Let me now briefly make one terminological point and one further sociological one. The terminological point is that ‘soccer’ is a 19th century neologism derived from the word ‘association’. The proper name of the game is ‘Association football’ as opposed, for example, to ‘Rugby football’, ‘American Football’, ‘Australian rules football’, ‘Gaelic football’, etc. The sociological point is that the soccer form of football can legitimately be described as one of humanity’s greatest ever ‘collective inventions’, a term which is intended to express the fact that the origins of the game cannot be attributed to a single individual as Rugby is wrongly alleged to be. (I am referring here to the mythical idea that Rugby was invented by a Rugby schoolboy, William Webb Ellis, in 1823 when he broke the then existing school rules by picking up the ball and running with it (Dunning & Sheard, 1979).) It is quintessentially a ‘social’ or ‘group’ creation which began to take on its modern form in the second and third quarters of the 19th century. Despite recent arguments to the contrary by John Goulstone (2001) and Adrian Harvey (2005), this initial generative process almost certainly took place mainly in one or more of the leading English public schools and the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and cannot be understood independently of the figuration formed by these schools and universities or the place they occupied in British society as a whole in the middle and later parts of the 19th century.

In 1953, journalist Geoffrey Green speculated that a number of public schools may have been involved in this process. A year later, former headmaster, Morris Marples, suggested that Charterhouse and Westminster may have been the primary social loci. More recently, in an absurd assertion, unsubstantiated by reference to either primary or secondary sources and in apparent ignorance of the fact that the boys there played with a strange-shaped ball which was neither spherical nor oval, Richard Giulianotti plumps for Harrow: ‘Old Rugbeians and Etonians’, he informs – or rather misinforms – the reader, ‘favoured a hacking and handling game, while Harrovians prohibited these actions’ (Giulianotti, 1999, 4). In fact, as Graham Curry (2002) has sought to show, the overwhelming bulk of the available historical evidence strongly suggests that the earliest prototype of a limited handling, that is, mainly kicking, non-hacking game was principally an invention of the boys at Eton. They called it ‘the Field Game’. They may have been acting in concert with some of their teachers but it is certain that Old Etonians at Trinity College, Cambridge, some of them students, some of them College Fellows, unintentionally played a central role in developments that
turned out to be significant for the wider development of the game. It were, in fact, the Cambridge rules of 1863, which were to a large extent demonstrably Eton-based, which were adopted with only relatively minor changes by the Football Association when it was formed later the same year. In short, the peoples’ game appears to have started as an exclusive activity of the uppermost strata of the English social elite. How can the spread of such a game, its transformation from an elite social activity into a globally popular one be explained?

The diffusion of the soccer form of football started in Great Britain and Ireland. It was from the outset a process which involved a geographical spread as well as diffusion down the social scale. A process of international diffusion also began to ‘kick in’ very soon. This latter process initially took place less rapidly and to a lesser extent within the British Empire, where, with the exception of Canada which came under the dominant influence of the United States, cricket and rugby were Britain’s main sporting exports. This was not the case, though, in what historian, Harold Perkin (1989) called the ‘informal British Empire’. That is, it either involved British soldiers, sailors, tradespeople, engineers and other professionals forming clubs while stationed or working abroad in non-colonized settings where natives copied the sports the British played or it involved foreigners who were educated at British schools and universities setting up clubs on returning to their homelands. Latterly the game has begun to spread rapidly in former-dominions, most notably in Australia primarily through the auspices of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. As Vamplew (1988) has shown, this has spurred Australians of British descent who remain attached to one or another of the two forms of rugby or the Australian rules game, to call soccer by the derogatory and politically incorrect term, ‘wogball’.

Readers will have noted that I have started referring to ‘Britain’ and ‘the British’ rather than to ‘England’ and ‘the English’. That is because men from parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland other than England soon began to play a part in the development of the game. In the first instance that was particularly the case of Scots who became central for a while in both football administration and the playing side of the game. This was the case in England as well as Scotland. For example, Lord Kinnaird (Green, 1953, 44), a Scottish Old Etonian and student at Trinity College Cambridge was an early President of the Football Association, whilst the Football League, formed in 1888, was the brainchild of another Scot, William McGregor. Scots were also the progenitors of the dribbling game and central among the earliest professionals. Best known among the latter were James Love and Fergus Suter of Partick Glasgow who played – and were paid for doing so – for the Lancashire side, Darwen, against the Old Etonians in the FA Cup Final of 1879, and Peter Andrews and James Lang who played in Sheffield for the Heeley Club around the same time (Green, 1953, 96). Men such as these were derogatively referred to by the ‘high priests’ of amateurism as ‘the Scotch professors’, perhaps on account of what they had to teach the English about the game as it was constituted in those days, as well as the fact that they were illegitimately paid.

Towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, moves were started to form international soccer organizations but, with typical imperial hauteur, the British refused to take part, seemingly refusing to believe that ‘mere foreigners’ would be
able to run a game that they (the British) had invented. FIFA – la Federation Internationale de Football Associations – was formed in Paris in 1904 by delegates from Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Representatives from Britain and Ireland were noticeable by their absence. The English FA did affiliate with FIFA in 1906. However, it withdrew in 1914, rejoined in 1924, withdrew again in 1928, only joining permanently in 1945. The use of the partly anglicized acronyms FIFA and UEFA to signify the game’s premier international bodies is one mark of its globalization. Another is the spread of organizational and playing dominance, first outside Britain and then outside Europe. To say this is not to deny the fact that Europe’s general wealth and power enable its Football Leagues to import talented players from all over the world, thus making the European Leagues increasingly cosmopolitan and international. However, the prior occurrence of the globalization of soccer per se was clearly one of the fundamental preconditions for what one might call the ‘domestic internationalization’ of the European leagues. How can one explain the emergence of soccer in the 20th century as the world’s most popular team sport? The reasons for its comparative success seem to me to be taken for granted by many sociological and historical writers on the subject. However, these reasons are, I think, inherent in the structure of the game itself and not particularly difficult to find. For example, soccer is a game which does not require much in the way of clothing or equipment and is comparatively cheap to play. Its ‘laws’ or rules – apart perhaps from the offside law – are relatively easy to understand, and they regularly make both for fast, fluid and open play, and for a game in which a fine balance can be recurrently achieved among a complex of interdependent polarities such as attack and defence, force and skill, individual and team play. (Elias & Dunning, 1966; Dunning, 1999). Matches can, of course, lack tone and be boring. They can also fail to come up to players’ and spectators’ expectations. However, the structure of the game as it began to be forged from the 1860s onwards – like social developments generally, it did not follow a simple straight line – permitted the recurrent generation of levels of meaning and excitement that are, more often than not, satisfying for players and spectators alike, and which can lead to endless discussions about, for example, whether Hiddinck’s Chelsea place too much emphasis on defence or Wenger’s Arsenal too much emphasis on attack. At the heart of this structure lies the fact that football matches are competitive physical, mental and tactical struggles between two groups that are played with a ball and governed by rules, rituals and controls which square the circle most of the time between the apparent antimonies of rivalry and friendship, and which allow the passions to rise but keep them most of the time and among a majority of people within what are considered to be socially acceptable, ‘civilized’ limits. To the extent that they are voluntarily obeyed and/or enforced, the rules and customs of soccer also limit the risk of serious injury to players, although, of course, they cannot eliminate them entirely. Nor are spectators totally safe as events such as the Heysel and Hillsborough tragedies so clearly show.

Soccer at the highest level can also have ballet-like qualities and these, together with the colours of the players’ clothing and other elements of dramatic presentation, help further to explain the game’s spectator appeal. It is an appeal which can be further
enhanced by the elements of spontaneous and sometimes pre-planned ‘carnival’ that are regularly supplied by the members of crowds. Of course, other sports possess some of the qualities I have enumerated here but arguably only soccer potentially has them all, most of the time at least. That is arguably why it has become the world’s most popular team sport. Let me conclude this paper with a discussion of some aspects of some of the more problematic aspects of soccer.

Part III
Some currently problematic aspects of soccer

You do not have to be a genius or a brain surgeon to realize that, despite and probably in some measure because of its success, soccer is not without its problems. In the context of the present paper, it is only possible to offer a brief discussion of four of them. As I hinted earlier, a common feature of at least two and possibly three of them is the fact that the game started as and continues to be a largely male preserve. Money appears to be at the roots of three of the problems as well. The four problems are:

1. the growing inequality in all soccer-playing countries between clubs that are capable of regularly competing internationally and the rest;
2. the anomie experienced by many top-level and retired players;
3. sex scandals and their exposure, particularly in the tabloid press; and
4. the continuing world-wide scourge of football hooliganism.

Let me deal with them one by one.

The growing inequality between clubs is a world-wide phenomenon and is expressed in England by the fact that the four or five clubs at the top of the Premier League have grown so rich in players and other resources that they are becoming increasingly difficult if not impossible to beat by lower-level clubs, even by those at the margin. This inequality is, of course, partly a consequence of frequency of television exposure, payment from advertising revenues and the involvement of the ‘super rich’ from around the world but it is also, once more, a consequence of the globalization of the game. That is, we appear at the moment to be in the early stages of the formation of continent-wide leagues, with the consequence that national leagues are being concurrently downgraded. This process may well lead to persistently lower level clubs being forced out of existence or constrained to become semi-professional and, in some cases in the longer term, even amateur. A short-term corollary of this has been the injection of a further element of unfairness into an already in many ways unfair game. Also, by making the outcome of a substantial number of domestic league matches increasingly predictable, with, in the British case, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United nearly always winning, it could contribute to reducing the excitement of what used to be widely regarded at lower level clubs as ‘glamour fixtures’ which gave them a chance to appear on a national stage. It could also in that way reduce their spectator appeal, contributing to a downward spiral.

Money is, of course, central to the problem-constellation just discussed. However, there is a reason to believe that the second and third problems outlined above – player anomie and media-amplified sex scandals – also have money partly at their roots. Top-level players can become anomic because their lives are only minimally structured
around work commitments and because they have an excess of time and money at their disposal. This can create in them limitless wants, together with feelings of superiority and inviolability, the latter two being enhanced by public adulation and their celebrity status. The ready availability of female ‘soccer groupies’, some of whom are out to exploit players with a view to selling stories to the media, plays a part as well.

This overall issue is a complex one and more cannot be said about it here except to add that, while the frequent reporting of the real and/or apparent sexual abuse of females by footballers appears to be a new phenomenon in the United Kingdom, it has existed in top-level sport in the USA for some 30 years at least. My suspicion is that what we are dealing with in this connection may well be a long-standing and worldwide problem connected with male sexuality and found, for example, in the military as well as top-level sport, and that what has been happening in the UK at least is an increase in the rate of reporting rather than of incidents *per se*. That is because earlier, tacit agreements between soccer players, managers and journalists not to report such issues have broken down, in all probability to some degree as a result of feminism and the growing power of women.

Let me bring this paper to a close by making a few comments about football hooliganism, another problem connected with the fact that the game remains a predominantly male preserve. The first is that, despite the relative absence of English-inspired hooligan violence in Portugal during Euro-2004, there are at least four reasons for believing that, while its contours, social locations and to some extent the social composition of its leading personnel may have altered to some degree, it would for a number of reasons be premature to describe soccer hooliganism as a thing of the past. These include such facts as that:

1. in excess of 2,000 known English hooligans were banned from travelling to Euro-2004. Had they not been, there is little doubt that more extensive English-inspired trouble would have occurred;
2. football hooliganism continues to be a problem world-wide;
3. incidents of pub-related football disorder involving fans who had watched matches on TV were reported up and down the country during Euro-2004, especially following England losing its matches against France and Portugal. In fact, such disorder has been a recurrent feature of every major international tournament for which the England team has qualified since Italia-90, especially when they lost penalty shoot-outs against Germany;
4. the making of films such as *The Football Factory* and *ID* and the publication of books on football thuggery by the likes of Cass Pennant and Stephen Hickmott, are indicative of a continuing and not insubstantial interest in the problem. It is not, as politicians sometimes seem to believe, simply going to go away.
References

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