

Chapter 2

A Brief History of Violence and Aggression in Spectator Sports

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Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard for all rules, and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words, it is war minus the shooting... Most of the games we now play are of ancient origin, but sport does not seem to have been taken very seriously between Roman times and the nineteenth century... Then, chiefly in England and the United States, games were built up into a heavily-financed activity, capable of attracting vast crowds and rousing savage passions, and the infection spread from country to country. It is the most violently combative sports, football and boxing, that have spread the widest.

– Eric Arthur Blair, British author and journalist, commonly known by his pen name, George Orwell (1945)

Introduction

Sporting contests have provided mass entertainment throughout history. Ancient Mesoamericans had their ball games, the Greeks had the Olympic Games, and the Romans had many spectator sports such as gladiatorial contests and chariot races. As pointed out by George Orwell in the mid-twentieth century quote above, present-day versions of these ancient sports provide entertainment for passionate spectators, and they tend to be heavily influenced by financial issues. However, it is unlikely that Orwell could have foreseen the economic impact that this “heavily-financed activity” would have in the twenty-first century. Plunkett Research (2010) reports that the US sports industry generated over \$400 billion in gross revenues during 2010, with the big four US professional leagues generating almost \$22 billion. As a point of comparison, the entire US movie industry generated less than \$10 billion in revenues in 2010, making it only slightly larger in gross revenues than the National Football League (NFL).

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One commonality among many ancient and modern sports is the existence of violence and aggression in contests. Compare a modern stock car race with a Roman chariot race: only the technology has changed. In addition, violence and aggression are the hallmarks of the most-popular, modern spectator sports. When Orwell mentions “football” as being one of “the most violently combative sports,” he is referring to association football (soccer), but he would not be surprised that the NFL is the most popular sport among US sports fans (Leahy 2011). No doubt, Orwell would argue that the NFL is popular because of the inherent violence in the game (see Chap. 3 of this book). Although his point could be debated [consider, for example, the issue of NFL parity and the success of the league (Hamlin 2007)], there is little doubt that the aggressive and violent nature of the game is an aspect that attracts fans.

Violence in Modern Sports

Ancient combat sports live on in modern-day professional wrestling, boxing (“prize fighting”), and mixed martial arts (MMA). Modern professional wrestling is more a circus than sport, with its mock violence, dramatic staging, and soap-operatic side stories. Nonetheless, professional wrestling has an ardent fan base in several countries; witness the drawing power of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) in the USA and the cultural significance of “Lucha Libre” in Mexico. Even the most ardent WWE fan would admit that this is theater instead of competition. In contrast, professional prize fighting is seen as a true sport, but demand for boxing entertainment has been on the wane for some time.

A comparison of modern boxing and professional wrestling might suggest that, at least in North America, there has been a shift in demand away from “real” violence in sports toward cartoonish depictions of violence. However, one only has to look at the recent rise in popularity of MMA competitions to see that there has been no such shift. MMA combines the disciplines of wrestling, boxing, jiu-jitsu, and kickboxing. One of the draws of MMA is that it allows fighters from these different disciplines to meet on a level field. The biggest promoter of MMA, Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), presents a spectacle that is a raw competition among fighters (see Chap. 7 of this book).

In 1993, when the first MMA matches took place, Senator John McCain of Arizona referred to the sport as “human cock fighting” because of its brutality. Although this statement was extreme and clearly incorrect given that MMA participants were rarely if ever killed by a competitor, it is true that MMA in its original incarnation was fairly brutal. At the time, the rules of the match allowed for anything except for eye gouging and biting, and the fight ended when an opponent was knocked out or by a judge’s decision. In response, the competition was banned from all but three states. After regulating its matches by introducing more than 31 fouls and 8 ways to end a bout, the UFC found its way back into the public spotlight. In 2008, *Forbes* magazine reported that the UFC promotion company was worth

close to \$1 billion, a significant number by any standard, but especially when compared to the price paid for the company in 2001, \$2 million (Miller 2008).

Ice hockey, the modern cousin of a variety of ancient games played with a ball and a stick, is another modern sport in which violence and aggression plays an important role (see Chap. 4 of this book). The North-America-based National Hockey League (NHL) believes that violence in hockey is unavoidable, but therapeutic and cathartic in minor forms (Eitzen 1985). Nonetheless, ice hockey “has been called the only all-human sport in which physical intimidation outside the rules is encouraged as a customary tactic: very nearly a blood sport, in fact” (Economist 1975). Although calling ice hockey a “blood sport” is a stretch, evidence suggests that violence is an intrinsic part of the game. Academic research suggests increases in violence tend to increase NHL attendance, so that the league and teams have an incentive to keep violent play a part of the game in order to maximize attendance (Jones et al. 1993; Jones et al. 1996; Paul 2003). However, Stewart et al. (1992) show that although violence leads to greater NHL attendance, it also leads to a lower probability of winning. Thus, NHL teams are forced to make a trade off when considering violent play. Specifically, violent and aggressive play may increase attendance directly, but it may also decrease attendance indirectly if attendance is positively related to winning.

Unfortunately, the violent and aggressive nature of the NHL game sometimes leads to egregious acts of violence by players against their opponents. In March 2004, Todd Bertuzzi of the Vancouver (Canada) Canucks sucker-punched Colorado Avalanche’s Steve Moore which led to Bertuzzi’s indefinite suspension. He was not reinstated until August 2005. NHL Senior Vice President Colin Campbell spoke of Bertuzzi’s punishment, but did not comment on changing the rules to prevent this kind of behavior, effectively implying that this type of violence was a part of the game. Later, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman repeated Campbell’s message and did not deny Campbell’s core message about violence being a part of hockey (Gillis 2004).

Chris Simon is another example of an NHL player who took the violent part of the game too far. In early 2007, the New York Islanders’ Simon used his stick to whack Ryan Hollweg of the New York Rangers in the face. Simon received a 25-game suspension that covered the end of the regular season and the playoffs, and went into the 2007–2008 regular season. Soon after being reinstated, Simon once again got into an on-ice incident, this time with the Pittsburgh Penguins’ Jarkko Ruutu. Simon pulled Ruutu’s legs behind his and skated over his right knee. Simon received a match penalty and was ejected from the game. His punishment as a repeat offender was a 30-game suspension, the eighth suspension of his professional career and the second longest suspension in modern history of the NHL. Simon played one more game with the Islanders before being traded to the Minnesota Wild. He now plies his trade in the Russian professional league. It seems that there is a limit to the on-ice violence that the NHL, and its fans, will tolerate.

If one accepts the thesis that the violent and aggressive nature of modern sports is a factor to which fans respond, then we are still left with two important queries: (1) Why are violence and aggression a part of many popular sports? and

(2) why do fans respond to the violence and aggression in the games they watch? From the perspective of an economist, the answer to question (1) is straightforward: Violence in sporting contests is an outcome of the forces of supply and demand, and violence and aggression exist (and have always existed) because fans respond positively to them. If spectators demand violence and aggression and are willing to pay to see such behavior, then teams and leagues will provide it. An economics-based answer to question (2) is not so clear cut, and the traditional economist will not give much consideration to answering it. For the economist, preferences for or against violence and aggression are idiosyncratic, and understanding the mechanisms by which preferences are created does not generate sufficient scholarly interest. Instead, the economist is intrigued by the way preferences are expressed in demand relationships and the ways in which incentives influence the way in which preferences are expressed.

Answers to question (2) normally fall under the purview of other social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology, which are more concerned with the causes of human behavior. In the case of NFL football, a sociologist may be interested in explaining why fans demand violence and aggressive play, while an economist would be interested in explaining how violence in the game affects a team's attendance, revenues, or on-field success. Furthermore, an historian may be interested in examining the historical factors and social processes that have led to the development of modern sports, especially the development of violent and aggressive sports.

Most of the chapters in this book deal with an economic analysis of issues related to demand or success in sports and their relationship to violence within sports. However, the chapters also include historical perspectives on each specific league or sport. As a means of providing some general background for the studies in this book, this chapter takes a quick look at social science research that attempts to explain fans' demand for violent and aggressive play, and especially the behavioral justification for the appeal of violence and aggression in spectator sports. This chapter also gives a brief overview of the history of violence in spectator sports. This brief historical review suggests that the most-popular spectator sports have always had violence as a component, a conclusion that George Orwell came to nearly 70 years ago.

Why Do Fans Demand Violence and Aggression in Sports?

Humans watch sports for many different reasons. For some spectators, sporting events simply provide entertainment in the form of unscripted drama and tension. Alternatively, the entertainment value may be related to an appreciation of the athletic ability on display. In this way, sports are similar to the unscripted-nature of reality television or the beauty and grace of ballet. For others, watching sports is a social activity, in which individuals of similar cultural or national backgrounds gather to have a community experience. Many ancient sports (e.g., the ancient Olympic Games)

started as rituals to honor the gods, a leader, or the deceased and later developed into large public spectacles, with city or country-wide festivities surrounding the games. Interestingly, we see the same sports-cum-cultural-festivals today in the modern Olympic Games, the association football World Cup, and the gridiron football Super Bowl. For some die-hard sports fans (“fanatics”), watching their favorite sport or team is akin to a religious experience. Whatever the reason, for the sports fan “following sport is a worthwhile leisure pursuit that enhances an individual’s quality of life” (Smith 1988).

Academic studies have found that violence and aggressive play in sports may serve to enhance the entertainment value of a sporting event. Aggressive and violent play may intensify the entertainment value because it adds drama (Comisky et al. 1977). Bryant et al. (1981) studied the effects of violent play in professional gridiron football on viewer enjoyment. For male participants, the level of enjoyment increased as the roughness and violence increased. Sargent et al. (1998) found similar results for a sample of 25 sport events televised in 1996. Each sport was placed in one of the three categories: combative (e.g., boxing), stylistic (e.g., gymnastics), or mechanized (e.g., bowling). According to the results, male respondents reported the most enjoyment from the violent, combative sports and the least enjoyment from nonrisky, mechanized sports. Female respondents, on the other hand, received the most enjoyment from elegant, stylistic sports. For men, excitement increased when violence was exhibited in athletic forms. These results suggest that spectators of combat sports and contact sports, especially males, are partially drawn to these sports because they provide something that other sports do not: aggressive and violent play.

In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that spectators enjoy watching violence and aggression. Take the example of the most-popular US sports league: the NFL. During 2010, eight of the top-ten TV programs were NFL games (Nielsonwire 2011a). In February 2011, Super Bowl XLV, which pitted the Pittsburgh Steelers against the Green Bay Packers, brought in the largest US TV audience in history. In addition, five of the top six broadcast audiences of all time were Super Bowls (Nielsonwire 2011b). Although the NFL is clearly popular for many reasons, one could argue that the violence and aggression of the game is an intrinsic part of its lure for the fan. Commentator George Will famously said: “Football combines the two worst things about America: it is violence punctuated by committee meetings.” Yes, violence may not be socially acceptable, but it sure makes for an entertaining sports spectacle... and the committee meetings are less than 30 seconds each.

The asserting dominance theory is sometimes used to explain why violence in sports is entertaining (Adler 1927). The hypothesis behind this theory is that spectators live vicariously through athletes, so that when a player slams the quarterback, it is as if the spectator accomplished the play. Betting on their favorite team or player also serves as indirect involvement in sporting events. And, because it is all in the fun of games, spectators believe that their binges (e.g., the taunting of other spectators or the athletes themselves) are harmless. For these spectators, “the excitement of sport spectacles is safely vicarious” (Guttman 1998).

Catharsis

Some social researchers hypothesize that sporting events provide a way to contain human aggression, for both the athletes and the spectators. The catharsis theory, or the theory of purging of emotions, is based on the work of Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz. His theory has several supporting assumptions: “(a) that destructive energy spontaneously builds up in the organism, (b) that the performance of aggressive acts reduces such energy to tolerable levels, a process which is pleasantly experienced, (c) that the performance of competitive actions also serves this pleasing outlet function, and (d) that even merely witnessing competitive actions serves this function, one seems to have accounted for the popularity of sports-doing and viewing” (as quoted in Zillmann et al. 1979). In terms of sport spectatorship, viewing a sporting event serves to both build up and relieve the “destructive energy” (Sipes 1973; Russell 1983; Wann et al. 1999). The theory also suggests that the more violent the sport is, the greater the pleasure received for both the participant and the viewer.

If the catharsis theory holds for sports spectators, we might expect to see less violence outside of the sports arena than would occur in the absence of violent and aggressive sporting contests. However, violent acts committed by fans are a semi-constant feature of sporting events, even those that are undeniably violent in nature. For example, Rees and Schnepel (2009) find that host communities of college football games experience an increase in assaults and other crimes on game day, even when the stadiums ban alcohol. A reinterpretation of the theory of catharsis could be the following: For a certain subset of sports fans, witnessing violent sports is not enough to reduce “such energy to tolerable levels,” and only personally experienced “aggressive acts” serve to relieve the tension built up before, during, and after an exciting sports event. Or, maybe some sports fans just enjoy hurting people and breaking stuff.

Discussions of fan violence in modern sports normally surround the issue of violent behavior of the fans of association football (soccer) teams, called “hooliganism.” The motivation behind fan violence is researched in depth by sociologists around the globe. Much of the violence appears to be related to socio-economic factors, such as poverty and class, but fan violence related to religion (e.g., Scotland) and regional issues (e.g., Italy and Spain) also occurs (Frosdick and Marsh 2005). Arguably, hooliganism was at its highest point during the 1970s and 1980s in the UK. Two defining events in the history of hooliganism occurred in the latter half of the 1980s and involved English hooligans. In 1985, the Heysel Stadium Disaster led to the death of 39 fans and to English clubs being banned from European competitions until 1990 (BBC News 2000). The Hillsborough Disaster of 1989 led to the Football Spectators Act, since which UK hooliganism has been in decline (Duke 1991). However, hooliganism still exists, as illustrated in Chap. 10 of this book. Recent violence has, unsurprisingly, been reported in locations with a history of hooligan behavior, between fans of Millwall and West Ham United in London (BBC News 2009) and in Argentina (Kelly 2011). However, fan violence has also been reported in some surprising places, such as Viet Nam (Viet Nam News 2010).

Although soccer hooligans are the most infamous violent fans, fan violence is an all-too-normal part of many sporting events. Consider the deaths of two college students in Boston in 2004: a college student was accidentally run over by a vehicle while fans were “celebrating” the New England Patriots’ win in the Super Bowl (AP 2004a), and another student died from injuries incurred when she was hit in the face by a nonlethal projectile shot by riot police after the Red Sox of MLB beat the New York Yankees to advance to that year’s World Series (AP 2004b). 2004 might have been an exceptional year for bad fan behavior in the USA. In November of that year, a tussle broke out on the court between players of the NBA’s Indiana Pacers and Detroit Pistons. As the altercation was broken up, a fan threw his drink at Ron Artest of the Pacers, who leaped into the stands to exact revenge, thereby creating a riot within the confines of the arena. (For readers interested in the minutia of fan violence, the drink in question was a Diet Coke.) Nine players were suspended, with Artest being suspended for the remainder of the season (AP 2004c).

Violence and Aggression in Ancient Sports

Much of the relationship between violence and sports in the ancient world derived from the connection between ancient sports and warfare. Sport had value as a technique for military preparedness, and it also had value as a substitute for direct military conflict. Battlefield tactics required soldiers to be in excellent shape, and fighting skills learned from combat sports were invaluable during times of war. It is believed that Greeks discovered the use of combat sports after the Battle of Marathon as a result of the hand-to-hand fighting that took place (Poliakoff 1987). Violence in modern sports can be traced back to ancient sports where violence was an inevitable outcome. These ancient sports had few restrictions, and even those rules that did exist were not always enforced. Many of these sports only concluded when one opponent succumbed to the superior strength of the winner.

Scholars have debated the relationship between war, violence, and sports. There are two general perspectives. First, some researchers believe that humans have a need to discharge their natural aggression, which can be accomplished in war or in a substitute for war like violent sports. In the drive-discharge theory, war and sports are substitutes in the release of aggression. Similar to the theory of catharsis, spectators use the viewing of aggression and violence to relieve their aggressive tension. Proponents of this theory would suggest that violence in ancient sports developed as a way to redirect the human need to discharge aggression toward a more contained and localized form of violence. Second, some researchers believe that violence in sports merely reflects the aggressive tendencies of society; the cultural-pattern theory suggests that the more warlike a society is the more likely warlike sports will be found in that society. Proponents of this theory would suggest that violent sports in the ancient world were simply a reflection of the violent nature of a given society rather than a relatively safe means to discharge aggression (Sipes 1973).

The Ancient Olympic Games

The most well-known ancient sporting event is the ancient Olympic Games. Begun as a religious festival, the ancient Games consisted of athletic events, such as foot races and discus throwing, combat sports, such as boxing, pankration, and wrestling, and equestrian events, such as chariot racing [information on the ancient Olympic Games is obtained from Poliakoff (1987)]. Many of these sports have modern equivalents: foot racing and discus throwing are still alive in the modern Olympic Games, as are boxing and wrestling. The ancient sport of pankration is the predecessor of modern MMA competitions. Although equestrian events exist in the modern Olympic Games, the true descendent of the chariot race is found in modern-day motor racing. The events with the most potential for violence were the combat sports and chariot racing, and these events appear to have become more violent with time. What is certain is that the ancient Games became much more brutal and barbaric after the Romans conquered the Greeks. Games such as gladiatorial fighting and bullfighting were enjoyed by the Romans not as a way to show strength and bravery of a fighter but rather to show how much one fighter can brutalize his opponent. The Games continued into the time of the Byzantine Empire, until Emperor Theodosius I ended the spectacle in 393 BCE.

The most violent Olympic combat-sport event, at least from the perspective of the Greeks, was boxing. To the modern observer, an ancient Olympic boxing match would look very brutal indeed. Fighters generally wore leather straps over their hands, but this was essentially a bare-knuckle fist fight that only ended when someone was forced to quit. Modern Olympic boxing seems downright genteel in comparison. An ancient Olympic match was not divided into rounds; instead, the match was over when a boxer held up a finger admitting defeat or when one of the combatants was knocked unconscious. One could speculate that more bouts ended in knock out than in capitulation. Lightly padded gloves were used by the Romans and Greeks for practice. In the fourth century BCE, the combatants started using heavier gloves that caused greater, and more dramatic, damage.

In contrast to boxing, the Greeks considered wrestling to be the least violent of the combat sports. A match consisted of a maximum of five rounds, and a wrestler had to score three falls against the opponent to be considered the winner. Similar to its modern cousins, a fall in ancient Olympic wrestling was defined as any part of the back or shoulder touching the ground. Although the Greeks did not think of wrestling as being overly violent, combatants were not hesitant when it came to using rough tactics to win, like strangling, neck-holds, breaking of fingers, or breaking the opponent's back or ribs. Striking an opponent was one of the few tactics that was forbidden. In later competitions, breaking an opponent's fingers was made illegal, but remained commonplace even though the consequences included forfeiture of the match.

Pankration, meaning "complete strength" or "complete victory," was a combination of boxing and wrestling. It was the last sport to be added to the Ancient Olympics in 648 BCE. Pankration was essentially a no-holds-barred brawl. Combatants used

the techniques of both boxing and wrestling, and kicking and striking with hands and feet were the sport's main components. Modern observers would no doubt recognize pankration as a forerunner of today's extremely popular mixed-martial-arts competitions, except that MMA would appear less barbaric since rules exist to protect modern athletes from injury or death. Surprisingly, the Greeks did not consider pankration as violent as boxing, possibly due to the inclusion of "less violent" techniques from wrestling. Like boxing, there was only a single round in each pankration match, and the competition ended when a fighter signaled that he was no longer willing or able to continue the fight.

Chariot racing, another sporting event with huge potential for mayhem and violence, was added to the ancient Olympic Games in 680 BCE, extending the games from 1 to 2 days. The races consisted of 12 laps around a track ("circus") with sharp turns around posts at both ends. The turns around the posts were the most exciting and dangerous part of the race; most of the excitement was for the spectators, and all of the danger was for the participants. Deliberately running into another charioteer was illegal, but penalties for doing so were infrequently enforced. In the Roman era, a hard median was placed along the inside of the circus that allowed for even greater danger and excitement. The median allowed a charioteer to try to get in front of his opponent causing the opponent to crash into the barrier. The Greek charioteer generally held the reins in his hands, while the custom for the Roman charioteer was to wrap the reins around his waist. If a Roman charioteer was knocked from his perch, he would be dragged around the circus, an outcome that, no doubt, made the spectacle just that much more exciting to watch.

Although not a part of the ancient Olympic Games, gladiatorial combat was a violent sports spectacle that developed during the Roman Empire. Gladiatorial contests are thought to have started as part of a funeral ritual. The combat consisted of a battle between two gladiators, between a gladiator and an animal, between multiple gladiators and animals, or between groups of gladiators. Unlike ancient Olympic contestants, gladiators were not Roman citizens; instead they were prisoners, slaves, or poor noncitizens. Anyone who was sentenced to the arena or to a gladiatorial school fought in the games until his death, unless he was freed. In the earliest gladiatorial contests, death was considered the proper way to end a match. This life-ending outcome became less likely as the spectacle, and the gladiators themselves, became more popular. Anyone who has seen the 2000 movie "Gladiator" starring Russell Crowe knows that a gladiator could admit defeat to a superior opponent, after which his fate was decided by the crowd.

Blood Sports

A blood sport is defined as any sport that involves the killing or shedding of blood of an animal. Such sports have long been a part of human society. Blood sports that are modern-day spectator sports include dog fighting, cock fighting, and bullfighting. Social acceptance of these sports varies greatly across countries and cultures.

For instance, bull fighting has a special place in the culture of Spain and Mexico, and is practiced in Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, but the spectacle is banned in many other countries. Bull fighting is also practiced in Portugal where it is not a true blood sport because the bulls generally are not killed, at least not in the arena. No matter what one thinks of the ethics behind such sports, there is no arguing about the inherent violence of the event. Bull fights end in the death of the bull, and dog and cock fights often end with one or both animal-combatants dead or dying... they are not called “blood sports” for nothing. One could argue that the existence of such sports is *de facto* evidence that humans enjoy watching violent spectacles, while the prohibition of these sports in many countries suggests that demand for violent spectacle varies over country and culture.

In the USA, such sports are generally banned and the consequences for being involved with these types of sports can be severe. One such sport is dog fighting, which dates back to the fifth Century BCE as an organized spectacle (Kalof and Taylor 2007). Dog fighting is illegal in all 50 USA states, although the penalties vary by locality. If charged with dog fighting, one could face up to 3 years in prison and up to a \$250,000 fine for each offense (CNN 2007). Nonetheless, dog fighting exists in the USA, and the blood sport is accepted and even has a certain amount of social respect in some areas (Mann 2007). A modern dog fighting contest consists of a match between two trained, fighting dogs. These animals are placed in close proximity within a confined space, and the dogs fight until one dog is too injured to continue. Fans of dog fighting enjoy the aggressive fighting and consider dog fighting to be no more brutal than human combat sports. As an anonymous source told ESPN in response to a question about public outrage over the perceived brutality of dog fighting: “They shouldn’t be really upset... Because it’s only just an animal” (Naqi 2007).

In 2007, the worlds of dog fighting and professional sports converged. In a highly publicized case, Michael Vick of the NFL’s Atlanta Falcons was charged for his involvement in dog fighting and was sentenced to 23 months in federal custody. He served the majority of his sentence and was released in the summer of 2009 (AP 2009). Vick was suspended by the NFL due to his legal issues, but he was reinstated in 2009 and currently plays for the Philadelphia Eagles. After the 2009 regular season, his Eagles teammates awarded Vick the Ed Block Courage Award, given to NFL players “who exemplify commitments to the principles of sportsmanship and courage.” A player who receives the award symbolizes “professionalism, great strength, and dedication. He is also a community role model” (Chase 2009). One could argue that Vick’s reinstatement and subsequent acceptance by NFL players is a testimony to the importance of forgiveness, especially after punishment is served. However, it may also simply be that in a sport as violent and competitive as NFL football, mistreatment of animals is not seen as a big deal.

An equally ancient and brutal blood sport is cock fighting, which has probably existed since the chicken was domesticated around 3000 BCE (McCaghy and Neal 1974). The contest involves gamecocks (roosters specifically bred for fighting) that are fitted with metal spurs or spikes around their ankles and placed in a pit to attack each other while bets on the outcome are made. As is often the case with dog fighting,

a cock fight generally ends with the demise of the losing animal, and it is not out of the ordinary for both fighting cocks to fight to the death. Cock fighting is an obsession in some parts of the world. Although cock fighting is illegal in all 50 states, and even being a spectator is a felony in most states, it is a multimillion dollar industry in the USA. Similar to fighting dogs, fighting cocks are revered in some circles for their tenacity and courage. The University of South Carolina even has the gamecock as its mascot. According to their website (<http://www.ugba.net>), the US-located United Gamefowl Breeder's Association argues that:

“There are many varieties of gamefowl, all admired for their beauty, strength, health, and longevity... Since early history, gamefowl have been an inspiration to man through their courage, beauty, and spirit... Gamefowl are a significant part of our heritage and culture and have been since the beginning of our country. History records that except for one vote the gamecock would have become our national symbol. The preservation of gamefowl is a must...”

Since cock fighting is illegal in the USA, it is likely that most breeders in the USA raise the birds for export to other countries. Or perhaps they make really good pets.

Bull Fighting

Bull fighting, a “cross between a baseball game, a Roman circus, and a sell-out concert by some X Factor idol” (Richardson 2010), differs from dog and cock fighting in important ways. Foremost, it is a big business practiced openly in major western countries, while dog and cock fighting exist mostly underground. Tour companies and chambers of commerce advertise bull fights as among the attractions in the countries where bull fights take place. Unlike dog and cock fighting, bull fighting has been romanticized in western culture. As an example, consider Ernest Hemingway's novel “Death in the Afternoon.” But perhaps most importantly, it is the only one of these three in which a human fights an animal. For these reasons, bull fighting deserves a bit more attention in this chapter than its sister blood sports.

Bull fighting, known in Spanish as “*corrida de toros*,” spread from the Iberian Peninsula to Latin America with the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the New World, though it was common in ancient Rome. The versions practiced in Spain (and in parts of France) and its former colonies in the Americas differ from that which predominates in Portugal, and not simply because in the former the bull dies in the ring while in the latter it does not. The widely recognized image of the “matador” with a cape and a sword standing close by a charging bull is from the Spanish *corrida de toros*. Aside from the bull and the common ancestry of the spectacle, the primary similarity between Spanish and Portuguese bull fighting is the great deal of pomp and pageantry of the event, which begin with a parade of all the participants, except the bulls, entering the ring. In both Portuguese and Spanish bull fights, horses and horsemen play a role. In Portugal, these horsemen are the stars and their horses are expensive and highly trained; in the Spanish *corrida*, the horses

are largely mobile platforms for a spearman to spear the bull in the back of the neck weakening his shoulder muscles so his head is lowered, thus providing the matador, who is the star of the show, a better angle for the thrust of the sword to kill the bull in the exhibition's final act.

In the Spanish *corrida*, matadors are the top of the profession. Below them come "novilleros," matadors-in-training who are generally restricted to fighting young bulls. "Rejoneadores" are horse-mounted bull fighters, similar to those found in Portugal. "Banderilleros" place highly decorated, short lances in the bull's neck, charging at the bull with hands held high, thrusting the lances downward, and dodging as the bull tries to defend itself. "Picadores" are the horse-mounted spearman whose job is to stab the bull with a lance deep into the neck and shoulder muscles. There are also "toreros comicos," individuals dressed in clown costumes or dresses (similar to clowns in North American rodeos) who play with the bull in ways intended to make the audience laugh. Finally, "mozos de espada" are the assistants to the matadors, managing their capes and swords while the matadors are engaged with the bull.

Trends in Demand for Bull Fighting: The Case of Spain

The Spanish Interior Ministry records information on individuals who are registered as one of the types of *corrida* participants mentioned above. These data are currently available from 2006 to 2009 (MIR, various years). In 2009, there were a total of 7,977 individuals from within the European Community registered as *corrida* participants, an increase from a total number of registrants of 6,670 reported in 2006. The largest group in 2009 was the *mozos de espada* (1,945), followed closely by the first class of *novilleros* (1,861). Matadors numbered only 693 in 2009, an increase from 600 in 2006. The data show that there has been a steady increase in both the total number of participants and in the number of matadors since 2006. Although the sample is small, these data reveal no evidence that the demand for bull fighting in Spain is decreasing; on the contrary, the increase in participants may be indicative of an increase in demand.

The Spanish Interior Ministry also records the number of *corrida* events each year. This information is available from 2001 to 2009, although the method of reporting has changed somewhat over time and recent data are more detailed. Nonetheless, we can get a feel for the trend in the number of bull fight events over time. In 2001, there were a total of 1,901 "festejos" (translated literally into English as "entertainments") in which bull fighting of one variety or another was a part. Of these, 853 were *corridas* involving matadors from the top classification of experienced bull fighters. In 2009, the number of events is broken down into *festejos* and minor *festejos*, with the former numbering 1,848 and the latter nearly 6,800. There were 778 top-tier *corridas* in 2009. Examining data for each year, there is no obvious trend in the number of events, but a comparison of 2001 and 2009 does indicate that there was a drop in top-tier bull fights in Spain. However, the total number of bull

fighting events in Spain does not appear to have decreased in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

There is a large anticorrída movement that routinely protests outside the “plaza de toros,” as the bull fighting arena is known in Spanish, whether it be in Madrid or Mexico City. One of their strategies is to make attendance at bull fights less attractive for tourists, who generally make up a large percentage of spectators. Generally, local fans of the *corrída de toros* are older, while younger Spaniards have much less interest. There is an interesting dichotomy on the subject of bull fighting in Spain. On the one hand, surveys suggest that more than 60% of Spaniards dislike or have no interest in the *corrídas* (Reuters 2010a, b; Narayana 2010). Nonetheless, bull fighting is an important part of Spain’s cultural heritage; in addition, there is still significant demand for the product. Attendance at *corrídas* across Spain was estimated at 30 million for the 2009 season (Ideal Spain 2011). Furthermore, a new subscription TV channel dedicated to bull fighting in Spain and around the world, Canal+Toros, was launched in March 2011 (Amoros 2011). Finally, the limited data on bull fighting as a profession and the number of bull fighting events taken from the Interior Ministry reports discussed above do not convey evidence of an industry on the decline.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have seen how aggression and violence play, and have always played, a significant part in spectator sports, whether we are talking about modern sports like the extremely popular US-based NFL or ancient spectator sports like gladiatorial contests. Modern spectators take pleasure in, and ancient sports viewers enjoyed, the physical nature of sports, whether it be the grit and determination of the gamecock or fighting dog or the energy and commitment of the NHL defenseman or NFL linebacker. Owners of modern teams and leagues appear to understand that violence and aggression, to a point, appeal to fans. Since the goal of an owner or league is to generate as much interest in their games as possible, there is reason to believe that teams and leagues will encourage violent and aggressive play, as long as the leagues’ chief assets (i.e., the players) are protected to some extent. In this way, rules and regulations for on-field behavior can be viewed as an attempt by leagues to encourage aggression and violence within given parameters, while simultaneously limiting the probability of player injury. Given the demand of fans and the encouragement of leagues and teams, it is no wonder that some athletes take violence too far.

From a sociological perspective, demand for violence in spectator sports may be a result of a need for fans to “blow off steam” (i.e., catharsis) or an attempt by fans to vicariously assert dominance over a rival. Whatever the reason, we spectators of modern sports enjoy watching players bring force and energy to the field and thrive off the spectacle the games bring. From an economic perspective, as long as the demand for violence and aggression exists, then sports leagues, teams, and athletes

will continue to provide aggressive and violent spectacles. If one accepts the economic perspective, there are still some questions that must be answered. First of all, one would expect that the demand for violence and aggression would vary by sport and by culture. So, for a given sports league, how much violence and aggression do fans demand? Next, given the trade off between aggression and injury and given that there may be an upper bound of violence that is acceptable to fans, what is the appropriate level of restriction on violence and aggression to limit injuries while maximizing spectator demand? The remaining chapters of this book begin to deal with these and other economic and policy questions in professional spectator sports. Hopefully, these chapters will spur further research into the connection between aggressive and violent play and demand in sports.

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