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<AT>Associativity, Gambling, and the Rise of Protomodern British Sport, 1660-1800

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<AB1HD>Abstract

<ABTXT>This paper argues that Stefan Szymanski’s theory that formal associativity in terms of British clubs and societies during the eighteenth century was the key factor in sport’s spread has been overstated. It was wagering, most especially the high-stakes “wagers” between wealthy individuals on sporting contests, stemming from notions of politeness, civility, and honor that generated media coverage, wider spectator interest, a larger betting market, and growing numbers of events, increasingly on a commercial basis. Wagering encouraged the development of sporting regulations to create “fair play” in gambling terms and to avoid subsequent disputes. Formal clubs and societies followed from this, but few were created before the 1760s. Later clubs were largely exclusive in membership terms, placed restrictions on play, and enjoyed dining (and drinking) as much as sport. The informal associativity around gambling was much more important.

<CAP>KEYWORDS<NM>: Associativity, sports clubs, gambling, modernity, commercialization

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<TXT>In the last decade, historians and sociologists interested in sport's modern origins have begun to debate and theorize the extent to which modern sport developed out of new forms of associativity created during the European Enlightenment.¹ A key text, by sports economist Stephan Szymanski, has argued that such associations developed autonomously in Britain during the eighteenth century following the retreat of the state from the control of associative activities.² For Szymanski, the evolution of modern sports was linked to the expansion of private associative activity, the social networks, clubs and organizations³ that individuals began to create in the Anglo-Saxon world as part of what Habermas called a new "public sphere" of genteel sociability.³ Szymanski also referred to other factors but argues that associativity was the key one.

This essay offers an alternative perspective, focusing not in terms of "modern sport," however defined (a major debate among scholars) but in terms of that period in England and Scotland stretching from Charles II's accession to the beginning of the nineteenth century. It offers an alternative argument, suggesting that associativity in terms of club formation was far less important and central to the development and spread of many sports than another factor: gambling.

Following the Restoration in 1660, gaming and sports gambling practices revived and became increasingly popular. Passion for play is likely to have been a reaction to the heavy restraints earlier imposed on leisure by the Puritan movement, which was culturally so successful in imposing its will through the English Civil War and the next decades. The more religiously fundamentalist Protestant churches were strongly opposed to gambling. English

^c AU: This journal uses American spelling rather than British, so you will see some words "misspelled."

Reformation society under Charles II reacted: it began as a courtly feature, and gaming centered on sports, playing cards, and dice games soon spread more widely.⁴ Historians of gaming have shown clearly gaming's increased salience from the beginning of the eighteenth century onward, linked to notions of politeness, civility, and honor, and sports wagering expanded as its fashionable appeal spread to the middling as well as elite groups.⁵ It also gained by its emphasis on high expectations, risk-taking, opportunism, and movement and helped shape a distinctive gambling culture, in which sporting excitement, economic investment, love of gain, and joy of conquest were often inextricably linked.

The involvement of the elite at the highest levels of sport, the large amounts they staked, and the betting market surrounding such events first drew the crowds and generated substantial newspaper coverage. Many of those sports that showed most signs of modernity, most especially horse racing, pugilism, cricket, and golf, were associated with wagering, just as had been earlier sports such as cock-fighting. They were supported and encouraged by the most wealthy, those with access to excessive wealth and much free time. Wagering on results came from a mixture of motives, including courage, honor, and risk-taking as well as pleasure, and was a fundamental aspect of identity. Growth of wider interest in sports such as footraces and wrestling as reported in newspapers followed later in the century. Sports club formation and sports' growing commercialization were secondary features, resulting from the centrality of gambling cultures.

The following sections begin by examining the place of British sport in the long eighteenth century in terms of key aspects of modernity and by assessing the limited extent of club formation and sociability. Next, an argument is presented for the importance of wagering and matching as a key factor in sport's expansion in the wider context of politeness, civility, and honor. The need for agreed-on rules is linked to the need to see "fair play" in gambling terms. Commercialism and associativity are presented as factors emerging from the

increased demand for sport stimulated by gambling interest.

<T1HD>The Protomodern Context

<TXT>The long eighteenth century should be seen as ushering in a form of protomodern sport. Just as “protoindustrialization” was that phase in Britain between the sixteenth and nineteenth century, the period was also one of protomodernity, preceding and preparing for “modern” sport.⁶ It had some but not all features of the modern, but not coherently linked in the ways described in its ideal types as defined by Guttmann, Elias, Eichberg, and others.⁷ Horse racing, for example, was secular. It had strong and widespread specialization and professionalism with trainers, jockeys, and many other work roles, animal-breeding expertise, and racecourse roles, too. Partly rationalized and bureaucratized, it was strongly linked to gambling and often had substantial commercial features. Public information was available from newspapers and specialist racing calendars.⁸ But its bureaucracy was limited, and it lacked quantitative aspects. Cricket had many similar features. Indeed, it has been argued that “by the 1780s cricket resembled the modern game in many key particulars” and was a sport where gambling played a “central and overt role.”⁹

Should historians see the early modern as a separate and conceptually distinct period? Recent historians, including Behringer, Thomson and Young, and Mallinckrodt and Shattner tend to think so.¹⁰ By seeing sport from the perspective of “modernity,” such thinking becomes a debate about whether sport’s periodization should be considered as an independent product of sport’s structural evolution or as reflective of broader social developments. There have always been elements of both. Changes in some sports such as archery or wrestling had their own independent patterns. In his 1998 study, Tranter showed clearly that chronologically there were usually uneven patterns of change and significant elements of continuity with earlier forms of sport.¹¹ Attacks on sports generally, together with features

associated with specific sports such as bull baiting, came from middle-class social reformers and more puritanically inclined individuals. Initially, their impact was limited and their claims probably exaggerated, given they were engaged in cultural discourse and assertions of ideological identity. Their discourses were often contested, challenged, or simply ignored. Griffin has suggested that, in many parts of the country, bull-baiting “simply disappeared” without fuss.¹² Despite some ambivalence toward sport, there was usually a very substantial degree of toleration, with others merely indifferent.¹³

The modernity thesis has always been closely linked to associativity through the formation of clubs and larger organizations to control sporting activity. Guttmann, for example, saw bureaucratization as vital: for making rules universally applied, for facilitating a network of competition from local through to international, and for ratifying records.¹⁴ This formal organization, institutionally differentiated at local and national levels, was a characteristic also stressed by Adelman.¹⁵ Certainly, rule-making and enforcement have been closely associated with bureaucratization, which has usually been linked to the emergence of a particularly powerful club. So, it is perhaps unsurprising that, when Szymanski looked back to the protomodern period, he attempted to develop a theory of associativity, club establishment, and rule formation to explain it.

However, Szymanski overestimated the existence and importance of formally constituted clubs and societies focused on sport during this period. He argued that major changes included the “creation of clubs and associations for playing cricket, golf, and the organization of horseracing in the first half of the eighteenth century.”¹⁶ Szymanski drew heavily on Clark’s seminal text on British clubs and societies, which actually shows that formal sporting associativity was rare before the 1750s.¹⁷ An online search of newspaper files for sporting clubs and societies confirms Clark’s view. And apart from golf, the membership of sporting societies and clubs was largely limited to the aristocracy, gentry, and more high-

status middling groups. These groups kept others out. Rather than having a key role in the spread of sport, they wanted exclusivity, limiting membership through fees and blackballing, and through the costs of special uniforms, buttons, and other identifying features. It was often the conviviality of the dining and drinking at meetings that most appealed.

Before 1750, there was a sole racing club, an early form of the Newmarket-focused Jockey Club, founded circa 1717. Revived in 1750, its limited membership was composed of the titled and landed classes.¹⁸ The other five or six racing clubs emerged much later in the century. There were a few archery clubs in the seventeenth century, with clubs such as the Finsbury Archers or The Company of Scottish Archers (founded 1676), but archery was always a minority sport. Though there was a short-lived London Club in 1722 and a few others by the 1750s, only the 1770s saw the “rise of the great clubs” in cricket.¹⁹ Bird sports such as cock-fighting lacked clubs, and “field sports” often had no need for either sociability or gambling. Early writers on angling celebrated it either on one’s own or as a gregarious social enterprise with friends.²⁰ References to angling clubs were rare, mostly late-century, as were hare-coursing clubs.²¹ Fox-hunting subscription clubs were largely composed of landowning gentry and started to appear in the 1760s. The fashionable Welsh Holywell Hunt was founded in 1767 and the Scottish Caledonian Hunt Club in 1777.²² Although golf was played in England at Blackheath, a club probably in existence prior to 1745, it was a largely a Scottish game. The few early examples included the Edinburgh Burgess Golfers in 1735 and the Gentlemen Golfers of Leith and the Society of Golfers, based around Edinburgh, in the 1740s.²³ Two clubs had been formed at St. Andrews by the 1760s. There was slow expansion thereafter: Musselburgh, c.1774; Fraserburgh, c.1777; then Aberdeen, Crail, Glasgow, and Earlsferry clubs in the 1780s and at least seven more clubs in the 1790s.²⁴ Most clubs had fortnightly or monthly meetings, combining business, golf, and dining, usually at a tavern or inn.

Szymanski also overestimates the wider influence at that time of clubs like St. Andrews and the Jockey Club. The Jockey Club was generally interested only in Newmarket racing. It was not then a leading authority on horse-racing matters and had little wider influence, though its rules were sometimes adopted.²⁵ Most locations had one meeting annually. Newmarket bans had little effect elsewhere. The number of occasions when the Jockey Club was called on to offer advice to other meetings was minimal, and its ban on the Prince Regent's jockey in 1791 proved ineffective.²⁶ The Society of St. Andrews Golfers, which generally had less press coverage than the Edinburgh clubs, copied the thirteen rules for its first competition in 1756 almost verbatim from those of the Gentlemen Golfers of Leith. Its wider influence came later.

<T1HD>Wagering and Gambling

<TXT>Rather than sociability being the key to sport's development during the long eighteenth century, historians are now slowly beginning to recognise that, in the beginnings and rapid growth of sport during this period, a key factor was the attraction of competitive wagering, a universal preoccupation of the age, but central to the genteel life.²⁷

As newspapers began reporting on sporting events in the 1710s and 1720s, it was wagering and matching on which they often focused. Three examples suffice. When a distiller and a goldsmith matched their horses in Smithfield in 1724, public bets amounted to £1,000. After wagers placed by several British and Italians at a London coffee house in 1725, an English drover and Venetian waterman were matched to fight, watched by nobles, members of Parliament and others. At a "cock-match" between the Duke of Rutland and the Earl of Exeter in Rutland in 1727, it was estimated that "above £50,000 was won and lost . . . by the wagers on both sides."²⁸

What was it about the cultural salience of gambling on sport in the early eighteenth

century that made it a progenitor of associativity and modern sport? Puritanism had given way to a more liberal cultural and political life. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688 Britain embraced parliamentary rule and more modern financial practices. There was also a shift of religious thinking which saw chance, misfortune or accident not as God's providence, but due to intermediate variables. The dynamic tension between chance and control, before knowing an outcome, gave gambling renewed attraction. It played a foundational role in the transformation of a capitalist economy and its rapid growth encouraged public credit and financial risk taking.²⁹ Sports betting fitted well culturally alongside the other forms of venture capitalism and financial speculation. Gambling was a way to teach young men about how to evaluate risk in a new world ripe with investment opportunities.³⁰

During the seventeenth century, the power of male landowners had weakened through a variety of factors: the Civil War, doctrinal differences, falls in agricultural prices and rents, a failure of male heirs, and social changes.³¹ Proving themselves worthy of power in this new political context, and reasserting their social dominance and pedigree, meant modernizing their views and practices. These changes included increased emphasis on public politeness, urbanity, and civility; a grasping of opportunities for patronage; a recognition of the opportunities for profit; and a leisure life more centred on metropolitan, cosmopolitan, and county-town diversions such as sports and wagers.

Borsay has shown how the urban renaissance involved reshaping the town.³² In and around the new leisure towns and county towns, racecourses, cock pits, cricket grounds, or golf links became arenas for polite, fashionable, and performative civic display. Civility and politeness became urbane phenomena, allowing distancing from the Tory rural squirearchy with its fondness for rural sports such as hunting.³³ The language of politeness became a key cultural idiom, enduing men with notions of proper public comportment, civility, cultivated behavior, self-display, and exchange of opinions and feelings in gentlemanly "company." To

be polite meant conforming to public and private expectations of conduct and appearance.

Wagering to assert their sporting opinions and to advance their own glory, reputation, and political influence at highly public sporting events became a pervasive and expressive form of this new upper-class culture. But it could conceal opportunistic egoism and carefully practiced external appearances.³⁴

“Deep play” and the ability to wager large sums of money sent out cultural messages about wealth and exclusivity. As Collins stressed, gambling symbolized “inexhaustible wealth, masculine excess and endless leisure time.”³⁵ It helped aristocrats make sense of their world in a period of change. The rich undertook the most extravagant and reckless wagers, gaining a reputation for losing vast sums. In 1720, for example, the Duke of Wharton reputedly lost £13,000 at Newmarket. Others dissipated their estates on wagers.³⁶ Many remained emotionally aloof from “play,” showing their contempt for money and the increased emphasis on a commercial economy and re-emphasizing honor and the aristocratic code. For the lesser gentry, their allegiances and identities tended to be organized locally and vertically, so an occasional visit to a race meeting, a cricket match, or a cockfight offered opportunities of wagering, display, and a variety of social, political, and economic interaction.

Just as good taste became a practical form of judgment expressed in connoisseurship and collecting, sports became a setting for forms of performativity where sporting judgment was expressed more directly in wagering. Gambling, spectatorship, and active participation in sport were all highly public performances, asserting manhood, honor, status, and reputation. Wagers were public negotiations, backing or laying a particular competitor for a specific sum. Bets were noted in small betting books but were also witnessed and remembered by other spectators. The social relationships between these individuals helped solidify their places in the complex networks of hierarchy, patronage, and “company.” Wagering helped

political leaders or political aspirants to extend their networks of influence.

Friendship and credit required esteem, often described in terms of “honor,” a masculine status rooted in a reputation for successful, chivalrous, and honest competition. Honor, reputation, and status had to be constructed within contemporary social conventions. It stemmed from position in the community. Honor had to be asserted and vindicated, reinforcing notions of gentility and politeness.³⁷ Honor helped construct gambling identities. A man’s bet could be accepted in a public context because he would pay his losses. Men risked their wager and gained honor and status from a successful bet. Like fighting a duel, paying a gambling debt promptly merged civility, politeness, and honor.³⁸ But some were poor gamblers and lost money consistently. Increased risk-taking and more bankruptcies from 1760 in commerce were mirrored in gaming, as business and recreational risk were increasingly conflated.³⁹

Sports gambling was stimulated and powerfully driven by press publicity, involving income-generating sports advertising and reports with rapidly updated information. Wagers created a heightened sense of competition and made results nationally meaningful for betting individuals and the reputations of those wagering with high stakes. London’s first major daily newspaper, the Daily Courant, was launched in 1702, its first evening paper in 1709. Provincial towns soon had newspapers. In 1708, Worcester, Bristol, Stamford, and Norwich all had newspapers, and by 1750, most towns in northern England and the north Midlands enjoyed at least one. Their publicity transformed racing, cricket, and other sports, signifying their polite attractions to the public sphere.⁴⁰ Print culture advertised, marketed, and dramatized sports, offering a variety of narratives. Reports on many sports regularly stressed the amounts of money at stake. When newspapers increasingly reported it in the 1730s, gambling had becoming clearly genteel. By then, racing reports used language such as “favourite,” “backed,” “laid,” and mathematically detailed “odds” as normative. From 1734

on, fortnightly racing sheets to assist gamblers were being advertised.⁴¹

Sport participation and spectatorship offered many cultural pleasures, but it was the gambling and money associated with sports that attracted press coverage, advertising, and wider interest, and these, in turn, shaped sports. Heavy deep-betting for high stakes demonstrated an event's importance and expressed the status, wealth, and disdain for mere money of those wagering. Around 1700, aristocrats placed bets on races between their athletic footmen. Commercially organized footraces soon followed, sometimes for wagers, sometimes for money prizes. At the century's end, a few aristocrats such as Lord Paget, Lord Barrymore, or Captain Barclay not only wanted to bet on the outcome of races but also actively participate in them for their wagers. Betting success gave prestige and profit. For spectators, gambling provided a strong form of identification with the contestants, their status, their regions of origin, and relational links.

In print discourse phrases such as "the spirit of gaming," whether described as "fashionable" or "infamous" or "the reigning vice of the present time," were commonplace. By 1763, one regional newspaper could claim, "So much does the spirit of gaming possess the minds of people that wagering is becoming the only way of arguing."⁴² Miers has stressed that gaming was a "pervasive social pastime . . . which Parliament sought with little success to remedy."⁴³ Some aristocrats bet recklessly. Parliamentary acts that tried to constrain them were passed in 1664, 1710, 1739-40, 1744, and 1774, often forbidding specific activities, imposing penalties for cheating, and trying to limit the amount staked. They were protective rather than proscriptive, trying to protect the landed elite from the consequences of their excessive gambling by prohibiting the enforcement of gambling debts. Such acts, despite their regular updating, were generally ineffective and perceived as futile. The laws demanded consent and were rarely enforced.

The wagering of the wealthy gave real impetus to the emerging sports of cricket, horse-

racing, and pugilism. Sporting competitions offered good gambling opportunities. Their outcomes were often uncertain, they required minimal social organization, and winning could sometimes be a matter of chance. Light's study of early cricket makes clear that, without the appropriation of the early bucolic rural game by the gentry for gambling purposes, other developments would have been unlikely.⁴⁴ Without gambling, argued Brailsford, "pugilism . . . would have been unthinkable."⁴⁵ It emerged through the efforts of entrepreneurs such as James Figg who opened his London amphitheater in 1717, attracting the patronage of the upper classes and giving pugilism a degree of respectability. In the 1730s, other London boxing "professors" emerged, including Jack Broughton, whose amphitheater opened in 1743. He left £7,000 on his death. Wealthy patrons supported these boxers, wagering huge sums on the fights and, after 1746, matching boxers by weight. In 1754, the Oxford Journal strongly stressed the connections between the increased interest in horse racing and the fashion for gaming: "To this polite spirit of gaming, which has diffused itself throughout the fashionable world, is owing the vast encouragement that is given to the Turf; and horse races are esteemed only as they afford occasion for making a bet."⁴⁶

Gambling was often normalized initially in match betting, challenges between two individuals "matching" their horses, gamecocks, or gazehounds; or cricket sides; or sponsoring working-class individuals competing on wrestling, pugilism, pedestrianism, and other individualistic events. A "noted Cheshire racer" and Irish "footman," racing in Barnet in 1737, were matched for £100 a side.⁴⁷ Matching was an attempt to equalize competition and create an uncertain outcome that encouraged betting. In cock-fighting, matching cocks was part of the ritual surrounding contests, encouraging status, honor, prestige, dignity and respect through successful ownership and heavy wagers, in which much money could be won or lost. The phrase "equally matched" was already a feature of cock-fighting advertisements by 1712. They might be matched by weight, age, or breed.

A second way of securing an event on which money could be staked was the competitive challenge. Aristocratic challenges were not new but were now linked to the construction of gentility. A golf match on Leith Links near Edinburgh, between Lord Balmerinoch's son, Alexander Elphinston, and the captain of the Town Guard, for a wager of twenty guineas, was an early example.⁴⁸ Sometimes there were bets placed on individual performances. Sometimes a newspaper advertisement would be put up by an individual offering to meet any opponent in a sporting contest and offering a money stake. A horse owner might post a challenge to take on any horse for a particular sum.

There was little gambling point in any sporting "match" where one contestant was a certainty. In matching horses, for example, both owners had to sense that their horse had a chance and stake an amount. Each could also make side (or "bye") bets, sometimes at odds, while other interested individuals might also place wagers on the event. In 1731, for example, there were twenty-six matched horse races at Newmarket, where many richer aristocrats and gentry attended, for an average £209 stake, and thirty-two matches at other racecourses for an average of £30, still a substantial sum. By 1791, there were 136 matches at Newmarket alone and fifty-two elsewhere. In 1809, such matches represented 36 percent of all horse races recorded in the racing calendars. The extravagant wagers of the elite attracted much criticism from reformers. But there was less attraction for the elite in risk-averse low-profit bets. As Daniel Bernoulli pointed out in 1738, their betting had what he called more "expected utility," since a low bet was worth little to them, while to a poor person, it would be risking a great deal.⁴⁹

Matching gave rise to the term "cricket match," in common use by the 1720s, as members of the aristocracy and gentry matched teams for large sums, of perhaps £1,000 a side or more, attracting newspaper interest. In Surrey, for example, matches usually centred on local magnates and their close acquaintances, noblemen and gentlemen of quality. They

put up the money and gathered teams, including men of much lower social backgrounds, sometimes from their estates, to win their bets. In 1735, the Prince of Wales made a “considerable match” playing against Mr. Steed and the London Club, with upward of £1,500 depending on it.⁵⁰ Publicity ensured wider popularity for the game, which spread from its southeast England heartland after 1737 and reached East Anglia, Yorkshire, and Durham by 1763.⁵¹

The Enlightenment drive for rationality, order, and organization applied to wagering, and information and calculation quickly aided sports betting. Advertisements for the first annual racing calendar in 1727 stressed that reading it would be more than a winter diversion but would “render gentlemen capable of reducing their calculations nearer to perfection and consequently of matching and betting with greater advantage.”⁵² In the 1790s, Butcher’s annual list of cricket matches fulfilled a similar betting function, by providing information on form.⁵³

By the mid-eighteenth century, thinking about risk had moved away from uncertainty toward risk as a form of knowledge rooted in conceptions of mathematical probabilities.⁵⁴ Skill, knowledge, and judgment aided betting. One critic of gaming bemoaned the way the “doctrine of chances was studied assiduously, and calculations made on mathematical principles,” where there was profit to be made as odds shifted over a longer time frame, creating a market for ante-post betting.⁵⁵ The books of the English gamester Edmond Hoyle included ways of profiting by applying the emerging science of probability to reduce the role of chance.⁵⁶ The first half-column-long advertisements for the new monthly Sporting Magazine promised to provide intelligence and comments that would interest “the disciples of de Moivre, the votaries of Diana and the frequenters of Newmarket.”⁵⁷ De Moivre was a French mathematician whose 1718 book on probability theory was prized by gamblers.⁵⁸

Probability theory encouraged different, more “scientific” forms of gambling among a

minority of the elite. Newspaper advertisements not only attracted spectators; they also allowed interested individuals to place bets in advance, regardless of whether they attended, and then find the result reported. In horse-racing, four-mile heat races had always encouraged in-race betting, leading some owners, trainers, and jockeys to manipulate horses in the betting market and in heats for financial gain. Betting on future races was further encouraged by racing's introduction of sweepstake races, where several richer owners entered, each paying a significant money stake months before the actual race, before form was known. From the 1740s, Racing Calendars were including lists of entries for races in following years as well as races past. By 1776, Newmarket's Great Sweepstakes, a hundred guineas entry, was worth 5,100 guineas to the winner.

Astute owners soon realized that, by later "hedging," taking odds against their horse, they could often profit either by winning or losing. More scientific punters could bet on or against different horses, following the shifting odds, as information arrived on horses' form, physical health, and owners' attitudes. By trading with a range of betters, and laying horses on a regular basis, money could potentially be made.⁵⁹ As part of what Birley has called "the insatiable quest for new and exciting forms of gambling," races became shorter, ever-younger horses raced, and new sweepstakes for three-year-olds such as the St Leger, the Oaks and the Derby Stakes were introduced.⁶⁰

Media coverage of sports wagering encouraged emulation. As the population grew from over five million in 1700 to nearly nine million in 1801 and towns grew rapidly, numbers of spectators and potential gamblers rose. Polite society included the landed and many of the middling property-owning sorts with a degree of leisure and wealth, who could maintain appearances. The culture of politeness downplayed social distinctions and facilitated access of new groups to these sporting locations. This encouraged wagering on the basis of a shared set of manners, as the middling and working classes learned betting politeness. They

had acquired a facilitating cultural literacy and capital to exploit in contexts like race meetings where distinctions were relaxed. At Newmarket in 1753, it was apparently “extremely difficult to distinguish between his Grace and his groom.”⁶¹ Middling groups could utilize public politeness as a screen to conceal their betting. Rich young merchants could use public gambling as a critical means for building and sustaining networks of support from below, extending their circle of friends, and establishing influence and credit. Many middling occupations mentioned described as wagerers, such as merchants, solicitors, shoemakers, horse traders, goldsmiths, physicians, publicans, or military men, had a vested interest in displaying “politeness.”

But such enlargement of polite society carried potential dangers for elite society. Making sports wagering genteel made racing, cricket, and pugilism more public, more publicized, and more accessible. Gambling sports more popular with the working classes took off, too. Later in the century, public foot races attracted hundreds or even thousands of spectators. A great deal of money was bet. Some wagers were on races between competitors, while, in others, a single performer competed against a previously set time.⁶²

In pugilism, as boxers from Jewish and other minority groups recognized its potential for advancement, their matches against Christian fighters generated the wider public interest, spectator excitement, and gambling that ever-increasingly drove the sport. Jewish and Irish spectators concentrated in London wagered heavily on their heroes. Leading boxers were well able to handle self-promotion, exploit religious and racial prejudices, and go on sparring tours across Britain.⁶³ In horse racing, new working-class gamblers, nicknamed “blacklegs,” attracted elite anxieties and social concern from the 1760s. As gentlemen became defined by manners, appearance, and displays of material culture, rather than background, “blacklegs” learned appearance skills quickly, blurring social boundaries and winning too often. Racing examples such as Dennis O’Kelly (1728-87) or Dick England (1735-1812), with their

disreputable working-class origins, learned to buy “gentility” through a combination of gentlemanly appearance, “politeness,” and honorable gambling behavior.⁶⁴

<T1HD>Gambling and the Need for Regulation

<TXT>Wagering’s increased popularity forced a change of attitude among the gentry.

During earlier periods, jousting aristocratic players had often refused regulation. Aristocrats did not want their actions constrained by a priori rules, especially those intended to create more level and fair forms of competition.⁶⁵ But eighteenth-century bets created increased demand for rules to limit conflicts and arbitrate disputes over winnings. Almost all early rules assumed an initial wager. Rules, vital for effective gambling, predate formal associational forms of sport. Vamplew has stressed that “primacy in the formation of and development of rules” can be attributed to gambling.⁶⁶ Rules emerged initially in quite ad hoc ways. Some were simply formal Articles of Agreements between participants, done in legalized form, often by notaries. Some were published by particular clubs that played more matches. Other rule collections were published by commercial publishers.

Where gambling practices regarding a sporting event varied from place to place and over time, there was plenty of opportunity for dispute and dishonesty. So, rules needed to be, not standardized, but agreed between contestants and signed by those involved or their representatives. Articles were contractually binding codes of conduct, aiming at preventing fraud and cheating and potential lawsuits and encouraging “fair play,” that is, satisfying the wager terms. Even early articles were fairly detailed. The Newmarket Town Plate in the 1660s had twenty-one lengthy elements. Newspaper press advertisements regularly referred to articles for a variety of sports, well before any evidence for associativity.⁶⁷

Any loopholes in the rules could and often were exploited by the unscrupulous, since most matches were what were known as “play or pay.” However the contest was lost or a

contestant withdrew, the bet had to be settled, and a bad loss reflected poorly on judgment. Many aspects of the ways sporting contests were to be carried out were carefully defined. Despite variations taking account of local context or specific earlier experiences, there were commonalities. Detailed study of racing rules showed that racing articles at particular courses might, for example, follow the Queen's or King's Plates, "the rules at Newmarket," "give and take" plates, "weight for age," or the "rules of horsemanship."⁶⁸

Early rules came at a local level, not from organizations. As some of those involved in wagering became ever more aware of the applications of probability theory, increasingly standardized forms of agreement began to emerge, and newly emerging sports emulated them. Those teams and individuals who contested more often and knew their rules best were at an advantage when it came to knowing how to exploit them. In cases of dispute where money was at stake, the terms of the articles were often referred to.⁶⁹ Rules for sports were increasingly made available in newspapers and calendars for others to use. "Rules and Orders for Cocking," for example, were already in print by 1743, with seven of them betting-related, including stringent measures toward betting defaulters and two more about audience conduct, and were regularly published thereafter. Early boxing rules were likewise there to assure fighters and gamblers a "fair match." The first surviving published rules were produced by pugilist-turned-boxing-promoter Jack Broughton in August 1743. His seven rules controlled the conduct of fights on stage and were partly to prevent potential betting disputes.

Cricket rules initially varied. Articles of Agreement in 1727 covered issues such as the power of umpires and guidelines about sums of money to be made through gambling. Another early list of cricket rules dating from 1744 survives, drawn up by certain noblemen and gentlemen when gambling on matches was rife. The so-called Star and Garter Club reissued a set of cricket rules in 1755; publishing their rules demonstrated their elite status and authority. Commercial publishers profited by disseminating such rules in other forms.

For example, a 1772 advertised book of popular songs included information on “rules and orders to be observed at the game of cricket, as settled at the most respectable meetings.”⁷⁰

Two years later, Thomas Clout Jr, a cricket-ball manufacturer, printed a revised set of cricket rules organized by a named “committee of noblemen and gentlemen” from the London counties, also based at the Star and Garter, Pimlico.⁷¹ By 1785, commercial publications such as the Sussex Almanack included “preliminary laws of cricket as lately regulated by a nobleman and observed by all good players,”⁷² Marylebone Cricket Club produced rule revisions in 1788, but, as Szymanski correctly points out, “it never put itself forward as the governing body of the game” at this time.⁷³ The following year, the Kent Gazette, arguing that cricket had become “fashionable,” “credible and manly,” published a set of thirty rules for inexperienced players, including three specifically on betting, an illustration of its continued importance.⁷⁴

All betting carried risks and potential dangers. There were the cunning and crafty, the defaulters, and those match-fixers bribing contestants or holding back racers to arrange results to consider. The various guides to recreation during the period always contained warnings about the dangers posed by professional gamblers who exploited the naïve, weak, and inexperienced: those “rooks” who pestered bowling-greens or the “blacklegs,” “sharps,” and “knowing ones” involved in pugilism, cricket, or racing. Allegations about match-fixing surfaced regularly. But the fashion for wagering was powerful, and so concerns rarely deterred people. Much gambling was honest and straightforward, and people in the know about a potential fix would usually say nothing and seize on the potential profit.

<T1HD>Growth of Commercial Features

<TXT>In the new world of commercialized eighteenth-century leisure, first outlined by J. H. Plumb and developed into histories of consumption and the urban renaissance by other

historians, sport played a key role.⁷⁵ Sports generated newspaper coverage, urban gambling interest, sociable spectators, and commercial features. London led the commercialization of sporting leisure, with its concentration of population, including many of the well-to-do. By the 1730s, cricket was widely played there and matches at the Artillery Grounds could attract up to 10,000 people.⁷⁶ London pugilists were quickly entrepreneurial too, giving tuition and exhibitions, selling instruction books and memorabilia.⁷⁷

County and market towns, urban and rural gentry, owners and tenants of stables, inns, taverns, and other businesses likewise recognized the revenue horse-racing, cricket, or pugilistic contests brought in. Sometimes, as in horse-racing or golf, supportive ruling urban elites would sponsor a competition to bring in visitors. From the 1740s until at least the 1790s, Edinburgh gave a silver club as a prize to the annual competition between members of the Society of Golfers. By 1764, Doncaster Corporation provided £50 annually toward its race meeting. Other towns such as York, Newcastle, or Carlisle often did likewise, perhaps also encouraging assembly-room building to cater for the county gentry and middling groups coming to the races. Even theatrical entertainment groups recognized the commercial value of sporting links, going from race meeting to meeting or including sports content. An attempt to cut back on small commercialized race-meetings by Parliament in 1740 was briefly successful, but numbers soon climbed again.

Working-class gamblers also adopted a much more commercial, financially grounded approach, with none of the elite's disregard for money and more interest in information in periodicals. Innkeepers played a highly significant commercial role, often helping arrange and advertise contests, so that they could charge entry fees or sell refreshments, feeding the growing betting frenzy, and this, in turn, began to undermine the earlier emphasis on politeness and civility as working people grew more interested. Inn and tavern keepers organized and advertised a wide range of sporting activities that encouraged betting, from

single-stick and cudgelling (most commonly in Wiltshire and Somerset) to pigeon-shooting or cock-fighting. Studies of cock-fighting, for example, show that, although the gentry might breed and match cocks, innkeepers promoted many contests. They were instrumental too in encouraging horse races, gaining from providing stabling for visiting horses; offering accommodation, food, and drink to visitors; arranging the meals that encouraged social behaviors; and setting up booths for drinking and eating on the racecourse.

According to the Gentlemen's Magazine in 1743, many cricket matches were already being "made for the sake of profit."⁷⁸ Cricket had been played at the White Conduit tavern's field, Islington, London, for some time when Thomas Lord (1755-1832) befriended the Earl of Winchelsea and other leading figures there and leased a tavern and field in the future Dorset Square area, Marylebone, as a private ground first for the informally organized White Conduit club and then the Marylebone Cricket Club. Lord, by then a wine merchant, was a cricket entrepreneur. He enclosed the ground and laid a wicket, which he was able to lease to them for matches from 1787. He used his business and cricketing contacts effectively to draw crowds, charging sixpence admission, attracting crowds of up to 5,000 for matches. He also used the ground for other money-making schemes, including footraces, pigeon-shooting, and balloon ascents.

<T1HD>Informal Associativity

<TXT>Sports like cricket, horse-racing, and golf were part of the broader associative leisure culture of the period, such as balls, assemblies, and concerts. It was not formal but informal association that allowed people to come together on a more temporary basis, with a shared interest in and passion for a sport or wager, gaining some joint satisfaction in it. The sociability of gambling was fleeting but offered social opportunities, community sensibilities, and an escape from domesticity. It did not necessarily require further efforts, but people

associated, discussed sports, and made wagers at inns, taverns, coffee houses, gentlemen's clubs, Tattersall's London betting rooms, the assizes, assembly rooms, and elsewhere. The aristocracy and gentry stayed at country houses, attended horse races, cricket, and golf games; wagered at cockpits; perhaps played golf together; and enjoyed country sports. Informal association was also common in village sport.⁷⁹ For most of the century, the dominant attitude of the gentry toward popular recreations was one of support, tolerance, and paternalism, coupled with a measure of self-interest.⁸⁰ Wakes, fairs, and feasts in villages and some towns were all occasions for more informally organized associational sporting activities, such as football, wrestling, cudgels, nine pins, campball, shovel board, cricket, slowball, pitching the bar, bull- and bear-baiting, or pony races for a bridle and saddle, as well as drinking, meals, dancing, and other convivial activities. The annual feast at Bunbury in Cheshire, in 1776, for example, had bull-baits and horse races.⁸¹

Holiday times such as Christmas, Easter, Shrovetide, and Whitsuntide were also times for informal sporting associativity. A contest might informally be set up and attract betting. The Frenchman De Saussure, visiting England in 1727, said that, when working men tried to resolve a quarrel by fighting, they would be surrounded by a circle of spectators, laying bets on the combatants.⁸² Sport reflected community values: the village wrestling hero was admired, the defeat of a neighboring parish at football was celebrated. Young men whose sporting success showed them to be the most daring, the fittest, or strongest were valued as potential marriage partners.⁸³

<T1HD>Conclusion

<TXT>This paper has argued that Szymanski's argument for the importance of formal associativity in terms of clubs and societies has been overstated, when applied to the eighteenth-century phase of protomodern sport's development. It was rather wagering, most

especially the high-stake “wagers” on sporting contests between wealthy individuals, that initially created media coverage and spectator interest in sports. By 1750, the landed elite had regained their role as natural rulers, partly through their use of politeness, civility, and the honor code. Gambling on sports such as horse-racing, cricket, cock-fighting or pugilism became one way to claim genteel status, so Parliament showed little interest in curtailing wagering between individuals or more widespread betting. Although there were legal attempts to regulate gaming, these were largely unenforced, and sport was unaffected. To have “fair play” in gambling terms also forced increased levels of sporting regulation to avoid potential disputes. But gambling attracted press publicity, more spectator interest, and rapid levels of commercialization. That, in turn, made more elite sports more accessible.

This encouragement of wider participation and spectatorship had unintended consequences. In the broader cultural, social, and economic changes of late eighteenth-century society, elite hegemony was challenged by powerful mercantile and industrial capitalist interests, morally earnest, more puritanical, and social reformist.⁸⁴ In the 1790s, aristocratic Whig wagering, gambling, and debt were increasingly attacked in pamphlets and polemics.⁸⁵ As gentility became less exclusive, some among the middling classes derided gambling in order to maintain their class position and challenge the insincerity and hypocrisy of polite sociability. As the slow process of industrialization accelerated significantly after c. 1830 with the widespread application of steam power and the new more amateur and respectable sporting societies emerged and rewrote their histories, gambling became frowned upon for its excesses and corruption and linked to a decadent aristocracy and an unrespectable working class who had not embraced “civilized” values.

This critique has been limited to Szymanski’s comments on sport in England and Scotland. Early modern sport in Wales has yet to find its historian, and Kelly’s study of Irish sport pays only limited attention to associativity. While Szymanski is correct to argue that

associativity was important, wagering's emergence preceded and encouraged it, and it is argued here that, up to 1750, the informal associativity and social masculinity that gathered round sport and wagering were more important than formal clubs and societies. Few of these were created before the 1760s. Most of the subsequent clubs were exclusive in membership terms, placed restrictions on play, and enjoyed dining (and drinking) as much as the sport. Wagering's growth gave a key impetus to eighteenth-century sport.

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