Altered Images. TV Sport and Cultural Change

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Introduction

Televised sport is a truly global phenomenon. When the final of the World Cup in soccer is played, or when the opening ceremony of the summer Olympics is taking place, people all over the world gather in front of television screens, no matter the time of day or night. In these moments, attention shifts from life's mundane activities to something exciting – and spectacular.

When sport initially was shown on television, the idea was to represent the event as faithfully, or as "realistically", as possible. The idea was to give the viewer an experience that resembled the experience of actually being at the event.

Today, increasingly, televised sport productions try to give viewers something more than what spectators at an event will get; it may even be argued that today television viewers are offered something else than the actual sporting event.

In this paper, I will discuss the changes that are occurring within the genre of televised sport. I will argue that to a large extent the changes are due to the processes of deregulation and commercialization that are guiding contemporary television. These processes have led to a situation in which sport events increasingly have been turned into fictionalized media events; events based on a television logic rather than on a sport logic.

I will argue that it is necessary to turn to the global level when discussing these matters; the tendencies are the most visible when it comes to global sport events. However, developments look differently in different countries. It is therefore necessary to apply a historical-cultural perspective; a perspective that takes into account the different – continuously changing – contexts within which televised sport is produced. This I will do in this paper by looking concretely at developments in three countries: The United States, Britain and Sweden.

The arguably most important distinction within the global media system is the one between a market system and a public service system. By comparing the development of televised sport in the US with the developments in Britain and Sweden, I will show that the distinction still is important to the way sport is dealt with on television but that the distinction is not as clear-cut as it used to be; public service stations have moved closer to commercial stations in the way that they produce sport. However, far from all differences can be accounted to that distinction. Each country has its specific history; there are similarities and differences between stations working within a public service and a market system that can only be understood by taking into account the specific cultures of each nation, including the roles played by sport.[1]

From Low-Tech to High-Tech Sport Productions in 22 Years

Squaw Valley, California, is a small, former Indian village, situated 2 000 meters above sea level. This remote village hosted the 1960 winter Olympics – the eight winter games ever held. Thirty countries participated and the USSR won most medals. American vice-president Richard M. Nixon opened the games and Walt Disney was chairman of the Pageantry Committee responsible for the opening and closing ceremonies.

It was only for the second time that the games were staged outside Europe. More significantly, for many European countries interested in winter sports – countries such as Sweden and Norway – it was the first time that the games were covered by television.[2] Producing sport from Squaw Valley in 1960 to a European audience was not easy, however; it was yet not possible to broadcast live between continents.[3]

[1] Sport is an important TV genre but it has often been overlooked by media researchers. The situation is getting better, however. Recent books (in English) include Wenner, 1998; Rowe, 1999; Boyle and Haines, 2000; Andrews, 2001; Brookes, 2002.
[2] The Squaw Valley games were not the first televised games. Already in 1936 it was possible to watch parts of the summer Olympics in Berlin on large screens in public spaces in the city and the summer games in London 1948 were broadcast to a (small) number of British homes.
[3] The first satellite Olympic games was the 1964 Tokyo games.

Entrance to the Ice Rink, Squaw Valley 1960
IOC/Olympic Museum Collections/Lothar Rübelt

The way that the Swedish broadcasting company handled the situation was typical for many European countries. The program "The Olympic Half Hour" was broadcast every evening during the games on prime time. This program consisted of live telephone interviews with Swedish athletes in California and of two days' old films made by a Swedish crew sent to Squaw Valley – films that had to be flown to Sweden in order to be broadcast.

Television was a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden in 1960 and expectations of what could be accomplished were not great; at this time just being able to watch moving pictures at home was special no matter the quality of the broadcast. [4] But even given this, "The Olympic Half Hour" was not considered good television by viewers and critics. The telephone interviews were often cut off due to bad lines and the films from the games were not terribly exciting; the viewers already knew the outcome of the events in question. Reviews in newspapers were harsh and a popular comedy program on radio made fun of the productions.[5]

[4] Regular programming started in 1956.
[5] A more detailed description of this and other sport events on Swedish television can be found in my book "Uppspel. Den svenska TV-sportens historia" ("Re-play. The History of Sport on Swedish television").

The broadcasts from Squaw Valley have practically nothing in common with the ones from the 2002 Salt Lake winter Olympics. During two weeks, Swedish audiences were able to watch more than 300 hours from the games on the regular public service broadcasting channels and an additional 250 hours on digital channels. All major events were shown live in often dazzling high tech productions. More than 90 per cent of the Swedish population watched at least one of the broadcasts; the winter Olympics have turned into an important national-global event.

Opening Ceremony, Lake Placid 2002
Getty Images

The change between 1960 and 2002 is due to many reasons. One reason is obviously the technological development; things can be done today that couldn't be done in 1960. But the change also has to do with the development of the Olympics as such and – to an even greater extent – with the role of sport on television.

From a contemporary perspective, the decision to award the games to Squaw Valley seems strange. When Squaw Valley was awarded the 1960 games in 1955, the resort in which the games were to be held did not even exist; the population of Squaw Valley consisted of just one person – the owner of the land. But the Olympic games were not major, global events at this point in

time – and especially not the winter Olympics. And for a time the Olympics continued to struggle.

As late as thirty years ago, the now so mighty International Olympic Committee (IOC) was close to bankruptcy. The thing that saved IOC then was – television. Before the 1972 games IOC decided that revenues from television rights for the games would go to the committee rather than to the host countries. At that time, the revenues were not particularly great. However, in Münich 1972, interest among American television audiences increased due to the success of the U.S. team. Even more important was the hostage drama that took place during the Olympics. It led to the loss of 18 lives but it made American broadcasting companies understand the importance of the games for capturing viewers. ABC had bought the rights for the Münich games for 7.5 million dollars. As soon as the games were finished,

Memorial Service, Münich 1972
Allsport/Hulton/Archive

ABC secured the rights for the 1976 Montreal games for 25 million dollars.[6] The American network had understood the entertainment value inherent in global sport. It had also understood that the political context within which the Olympics always are played out not only had a news value, but also an entertainment value.

The Commercialization and Deregulation of Televised Sport

Sport and media have been interlinked ever since the advent of modern media.[7] But what the example from the winter Olympics shows is how intense this interaction has become.[8] The Olympics cannot survive any longer without television. And the American networks pay large sums for the broadcast rights because they believe the Olympics will help them in the ratings race against the other networks. Sport and television have moved closer to each other. And, as could be seen in the example above, a main reason behind this is that televised sport has become such an important commercial commodity.

In the United States, television has always existed within a market system, a system emphasising entertainment values. Within this system, sport has had to compete with other genres for its place on the screen; a competition often decided on the basis of audience ratings. There has also continuously been a competition between the different networks for the rights to the main sport events. In many European countries, where for a long time public service broadcasting was the dominating model – a model emphasising neutrality and journalism – the situation has been different. Within this system, the decision whether to broadcast sport events or not has been made more on the basis of their value to audiences than on their ratings.

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[6] Barnett 1990:38.

[7] The first sport journals were started in Britain in the late 18th Century and sport was also covered by British newspapers at that point in time. For the early history of media and sport, cf. Rader, 1984; Goldlust, 1987; McChesney, 1989; Lever and Wheler, 1993; Boyle and Haines, 2000.

[8] There is not a "natural", essential connection between sport and the media but historically they have fitted together, with both parts gaining from the interaction. Sport became parts of the program output of both radio and television in most Western countries early on and the sport programs were very

Lately, however, both the American market system and the northern European public service system have become increasingly commercialized and competitive. This may be noted on a general level but it can also be seen more specifically in relation to sport.

In the United States, the main networks now have to compete with specific sport channels on cable television. In 1979, ESPN, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, started broadcasting minor sport events on a low budget to an insignificant number of households. Today, owned by the Walt Disney Corporation, it is the largest cable network in the country, available in 76 million homes.[9] Its success has led to competitors such as Fox Sports Net as well as to regional sport cable channels.

In Europe, deregulation has led to a situation in which public service corporations now are getting fierce competition from commercially financed stations. In Britain, BBC competes not only with ITV but also with satellite stations such as the Rupert Murdoch owned BSkyB, which in 1992 bought the rights to English Premier League soccer. The French state financed TF1 was privatized in 1987. Since then the station has focused more on sport than earlier but the privately owned Canal Plus has become the most influential sport producing station.[10] In Sweden, public service television's monopoly was broken in the late 1980s and in 1989 the commercially financed, satellite based, TV3, broadcasting from Britain to Sweden, took over the rights to the world championship in ice hockey. This championship – for Swedish people arguably the most important one within the world of sport – has since then not been available for the whole Swedish population.

The Globalization of Televised Sport

The processes above deal with commercialization and de-regulation in different countries. But, as can clearly be noted there are similarities between

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important in the popularization of the new media. Cf. Parente, 1974; Rader, 1984; Barnett, 1990; Reimer, 2002.

[9] Freeman, 2000:5.

the processes; similarities that make it relevant to move the discussion from a national to a global level.

Globalization is nothing new to sport. In order to make possible competition between athletes from different places, rules to different sports were standardized early on. This was done before the start of the 18th Century for horse racing, golf, cricket, boxing, rowing and fencing, leading to an internationalization of these sports. Other sports followed. Already in the second half of the 19th Century athletes – primarily British ones – started to call themselves "world champions".[11]

Globalization is not a new feature of the media system either. It is to a large extent due to the media bringing continents closer – to compressing time and space – that globalization processes are possible. [12]

But what the processes outlined above indicate is the increasing intensification of the globalization process. Sport events are increasingly turning into global events; the Olympics, the World Cup in soccer and the World championship in athletics are watched all over the world and athletes such as Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods are universally known.[13] And global forces play an increasing role for the sports/media complex; similarities between media systems are becoming greater and independent decisions on how to deal with televised sport are becoming increasingly difficult to make on a national level.[14]

Rod Brookes argues that from the 1940s to the 1970s, televised sport was produced according to an industrial model. During this period, both American and Western European broadcasters worked within systems of monopoly,

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[10] McKeever, 1988.
[11] Van Bottenburg, 2001. Sometimes the processes involved go under the name of sportization. The processes ... "involve the multilayered flow of sports, capital, personnel, technologies/landscapes and ideologies" (Maguire, 1999:6). It may be added that also the commercialization of sport is an old phenomenon. Nineteenth-century amateurism is an "invented tradition" (Pope 1997:19).
[12] Harvey, 1989.
[13] In the late 1990s, Michael Jordan was arguably the most recognized person in the world (Armstrong, 2001:15).
[14] The concept of the sports/media complex comes from Jhally, 1989.

duopoly or oligolopoly, and managed to keep costs of sport rights low as well as sustain a high level of production. But in line with increasing commercialization and deregulation, and with technological development making possible a market segmentation (direct broadcasting satellites, pay-per-view, etc), the system has changed to a post-industrial, or post-Fordist, one. The competition has become fierce and audience tastes are changing faster than ever.[15]

A typical feature of post-industrialism is vertical integration. In order to survive, companies try to control all sections of the system they belong within. This means that major media corporations are buying sport organisations. The Walt Disney Corporation owns the baseball team California Angels and the ice hockey team Anaheim Mighty Ducks. AOL Time Warner owns the baseball team Atlanta Braves and the basketball team Atlanta Hawks. The French TV company Canal Plus owns the soccer team Paris St. Germain. The Italian soccer team Inter Milan belong to the Berlusconi group together with a number of Italian television stations.

Another typical feature of post-industrialism is the broadening of the market from a national to a global level. When national markets become saturated, the only way to increase profits is to turn to other markets.

This can be seen in the way that American sports such as football, basketball and baseball have tried to market themselves in other countries – with various levels of success.[16]

Even more important is the way that media corporations have turned global. The Rupert Murdoch controlled News Network owns Fox (which focuses strongly on sport) in the U.S., Sky Latin America, Star in South-East Asia and

[15] Brookes, 2002:53-64.
[16] Most often with little success. Bairner writes: "...few have been able to claim with any degree of conviction that American culture has played a similar role in the world of sport to that which it might have played in the fields of popular music or cinema" (2001:13).

BSkyB (which also focuses on sport) in Great Britain. ESPN have networks covering the U.S., Latin America, Asia and the Middle East.[17]

What are the consequences of an increasingly commercial, deregulated and globalized media system? One main consequence is that broadcasting companies – both commercial and public service ones – increasingly have to focus upon attracting large audiences. Commercial stations need large audiences in order to secure advertisers and public service stations need large audiences in order to legitimize their existence. This, in turn, have lead to changes in the ways that sport is represented on television.

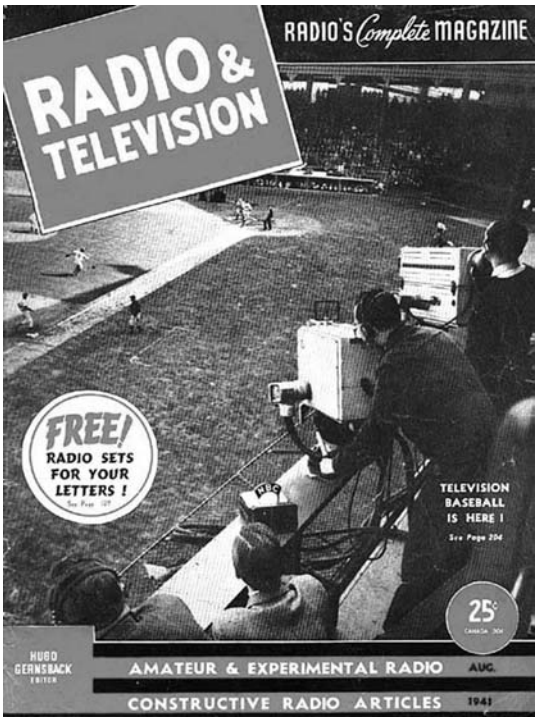
"Plausibly Live": From Realism to Dramatization

For obvious reasons, the first sport productions on television were crude. The first ever baseball game on American television (1939) was covered by one camera, for instance. The example of the 1960 winter Olympics also shows how television struggled with sport. But the situation changed through technological developments. Through the use of slow motion and repeats, productions were increasingly dramatized, this in order to heighten the feeling of presence for the viewers; technology was used in order to recreate what was happening as faithfully and realistically as possible.

This striving for realism has to a certain extent been replaced by a deliberate attempt of fictionalization, however. Productions are still dramatized, but for a different purpose.[18] Again the Olympic games may serve as a good example.

During the 1996 summer games in Atlanta, NBC coined the phrase "plausibly live" to describe their productions. The phrase was used to describe broadcasts that were not live but could have been. The risk with broadcasting sport live is always that the excitement disappears; one team or one athlete is superior to the opponents. Thus, NBC argued, in order to guarantee

[17] Cf. Bellamy, 1998.
[18] In order to represent a three-dimensional event like sport on television, it is always necessary to dramatize. The question is how and for what purpose.



excitement it was safer to broadcast edited versions of events; versions that producers and commentators were in total control over. In order to further assure the viewers of a captivating production, a focus was put on story-telling. Before the games TV crews were sent all over the world to produce short video films describing unusual life histories of athletes. These films were subsequently shown in relation to the different events – sometimes even in the middle of an event.[19] The productions of the Olympics resembled the ones of melodramas and soap operas.[20]

Trying to fictionalize sport events is not restricted to the Olympics. Generally, there is a tendency to heighten the excitement of televised sport – partly through high tech productions. Producers are experimenting with new camera angles and with microphones close to the action. Images that can only be seen on television, like the ten yard marker in football, are employed and viewers are invited to chat over the web with commentators. There is also an

[19] As the president of NBC put it: "Story-telling is the absolute key ... even more important than who wins or loses ... We want to tell a story, tell it well and move on" (Kinkema and Harris, 1998:32).
[20] Gina Daddario (1998) has analysed the productions of the Olympic games of 1992, 1994 and 1996. Her point is that the productions shared many characteristics with the traditionally female genres of

increase in speed. Camera cuts are getting more and more frequent. When Sweden and Brazil met in the final of the World Cup in soccer in 1958, there was a cut between cameras every 35 seconds. When Sweden played Belgium in the opening game of the European championship in 2000 cuts were made every seven seconds! The game is moving at a pace that is five times faster. The motto of the Olympics – "citius, altius, fortius" (faster, higher, stronger) – fits television sport productions as well as it fits athletes' performances.

Spectacle and Predictability

What are the consequences for televised sport of the tendencies outlined above? Two things stand out.

On the one hand, sport productions are becoming spectacles. In order to compete with the experience of witnessing an event live, and in order to compete with other TV programs (and, of course, with other kinds of pleasures), a sport production has to be larger than life. It has to give something more than "just" sport. A televised sport production is made into a major media event, an event in which television plays as significant a part as the event itself. [21] For example, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic games draw more viewers than the actual game. Another example of the media event taking over from the sport event is the Super Bowl, the final between the two best teams in the National Football League. As Martin and Reeves have argued, the event used to have a mythic function. Now, its function is more carnivalesque. The game itself has become decentralised and is today only one part of a grand television spectacle, with commercials aired for the first time and lavish pre-game and half-time shows being of equal interest to the viewers.[22]

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melodramas and soaps, particularly in their focus on open narratives and on attempts to make possible viewer identification with the competing athletes.

[21] Dayan and Katz, 1992.

[22] The event is year after year one of the most watched programs on American television and the costs for airing commercials have soared. In 1967 a thirty-second commercial cost 40 000 dollars. In 2000, the cost was 2 200 000 dollars (Martin and Reeves, 2001:219).

But there is also another consequence of the ways that TV sport productions are moving.

It used to be the case that televised sport was produced quite differently in different countries. In British productions of soccer, for instance, cameras were placed closer to the field than in German productions and the rhythm of south European and north European soccer productions was different.[23] It is still possible to notice national differences in sport productions, but these differences have become smaller. There is a belief among the key players within the sports/media complex that audiences want to feel at home at a televised sport event; as a viewer, you are not supposed to be able to tell whether the World Cup final is played in London, Tokyo or New York. Consequently, camera positions are becoming increasingly similar and cuts are made in similar ways. Concretely, this is taken care of by having the major global events produced by the same people no matter where in the world they are taking place.

Another thing happening to the genre has to do with its appropriation of characteristics from other television genres. I have already discussed how sport productions have moved towards melodrama and soap opera, and how there is a trend away from live broadcasts. Again, the reason is to maximize audiences; by moving towards other entertainment genres, the hope is to attract new audiences, particularly female viewers. But by going "plausibly live" rather than actually live, sport programs also fit easier into programming schedules. By getting away from live broadcasts there is no risk of delays to other programs – or of not getting all commercials shown when they are supposed to. Televised sport productions are becoming more predictable. They are being remoulded in order to correspond more smoothly to the cultural logic of contemporary television.

[23] I discuss this in more detail in my book "Uppspel".

Spectacle and predictability. At first it would seem as if these two phenomena do not fit together: How can you produce something extraordinary that is at the same time predictable? But they do go together. What it means is "only" that producers have to be creative and do something special within specific limits. And that is nothing unusual within the media industry.

But what we are witnessing is a turn away from the specificity of sport. One of the characteristics of the genre of sport is that it historically arguably more than any other genre has combined entertainment, news and drama.[24] This complex constitution is a main reason behind the fascination for the genre. Now sport seems to be moving towards a more clear-cut entertainment type of genre.

From the Global to the Historical-Cultural

My discussion can be criticized for showing the developments within televised sport in a too negative light. It could also be criticized for being too focused on developments within the United States.

It is true that the turn towards entertainment, story-telling and spectacle is not as strong in other countries. It is also the case that this turn is not typical of all kinds of US sport productions. But what I have wanted to focus upon is the articulation of the American media system logic, contemporary sports and globalization. It is at that point – the point at which these three phenomena meet – that we most clearly can see the tendencies outlined in this paper. Thus, the tendencies have American origins but are more visible in global productions than in American ones.

There is yet one more reason for highlighting US developments.

[24] Whannel, 1992.

Coca-Cola "Olympic City", Atlanta 1996
IOC/Olympic Museum Collections/John Gichigi

The statements above concerning an increasing homogenisation may be taken to suggest that sport productions today have turned into a compromise between different ways of doing sport. But that is not what has happened. If it earlier was possible to clearly distinguish between a northern European public service tradition emphasising neutrality and journalism and an American commercial tradition emphasising entertainment, today the American model's influence can be noted in European sport productions. This is clearly to be seen in the way that BSkyB produces English soccer or in the way that the Swedish commercial stations TV3 and TV4 produce ice hockey and handball.[25]

But the influence can also be found in the way that public service corporations produce sport. For the 2000 summer Olympics in Sydney, Swedish public service television created the program "Hello Sydney". The program contained lots of sport from Sydney but the events were presented within the framework of a talk show, with the highlights from Sydney mixed with performances from well known Swedish artists.

[25] Silk et al, 2000; Reimer, 2002.

Is this the future, then? Sport as a "blurred genre"?[26] No, not in that simple manner. I argued before for the necessity of treating the global level in relation to televised sport. But there is also – always – a historical-cultural level; a level dealing with the meaning of sport and televised sport in different contexts. Globalization processes do not simply impact upon different nations in a unitary way. These nations have histories. And sport and television play different roles in these countries; roles that are not pre-given or essential but still significantly different.

The distinction between a public service model and a market model, referred to earlier, is still important. The basic premise, concerning responsibility, is radically different. A public service system is based on a responsibility towards all viewers; diversity and quality are key words. In a market system, the networks' responsibilities are primarily to owners and advertisers; high quality programs that do not attract advertisers do not stay on the air. As a result of this, in Europe sport has been shown on television regularly whereas in the United States its presence has depended on the popularity of specific sports at each particular point in time.[27] Furthermore, European public service stations have attempted to present a broader picture of sport than have American networks, including also minority sports in their coverage. And in so doing, public service stations have also taken a responsibility for sports as such. This, at least, is what Steven Barnett argues in the case of Britain. He writes that

> a critical and decisive factor in the development of the sport/television relationship in the UK was a national, non-commercial and monopolistic broadcaster with an implicit responsibility for looking after the best interests of sport as well as the interests of the viewers. The absence of purely financial criteria allowed broadcasters to take decisions which were, in their view, not detrimental to the sports they televised (1990:21)

[26] Geertz, 1983.
[27] In the late 1940s and early 1950s sport was highly visible on American prime time television, particularly in the form of boxing, wrestling and roller derby. In the mid 1950s only boxing remained of these. Five years later, also boxing disappeared. Baseball was popular in the mid 1950s but struggled in the 1960s (cf. Rader, 1984).

Thus, the differences between the two systems are fairly distinct. But, the point made by Barnett about the BBC taking responsibility for sport as such also shows that there are differences within the public service system. From my research on televised sport in Sweden, it becomes quite clear that the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation have never seen it as their objective to help different sports. Instead, ever since the start of Swedish television, the choice of which sports to show has been based on professional decisions regarding the quality of and interest in each sport. If a sport thereby becomes invisible and finds it difficult to attract new competitors, then that is not the problem or responsibility of television, it is argued.[28]

Why this difference? It has to do with the different role of sport in the two countries. Sport is of course part of culture in both countries. But in Sweden, sport is a physical and popular culture. Sport has been an important component in a state-directed, educational promotion of health for all citizens. Sport belongs within a nature context and the most popular athletes are athletes of the people. In Britain, the meaning of sport is more contested. There is a notion of sport as popular culture that resembles the situation in Swedish. But there is also a more narrow conceptualization of sport as high culture; sport is an important part of British culture and one of the things that has made Britain great. To give an example, in the government report "Sport: Raising the Game" from 1995, it says:

> Sport is a central part of Britain's national heritage. We invented the majority of the world's great sports ... Sport is a binding force between generations and across borders. But, by a miraculous paradox, it is at the same time one of the defining characteristics of nationhood and of local pride. We should cherish it for both those reasons[29]

With these different views, it becomes easier to understand why BBC early on promoted the main sporting events as important British events whereas in Sweden, while visible from the beginning, sport was not deemed important. In

[28] Cf. Reimer, 2002.
[29] Quoted from Maguire, 1999:5. T.S. Eliot's famous description of culture also indicates the standing of sport within British culture. For Eliot, culture: " ... includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelth of August, a cup final, the dog

this, the role of sport on Swedish television actually resembled sport's role on early American television more than its role on British. As already stated, in the US, sport's role depended primarily on viewing figures. But, what is today often forgotten is that early American television had a class bias, leading to a disdainful view of sport:

> William Paley at CBS and David Sarnoff at NBC were radio pioneers first and foremost; their first instinct upon finding themselves TV barons was to reward their greatest radio stars with new exposure on the new video curiosity.
>
> Sports? Paley and Sarnoff weren't interested in sports, unless you count polo and golf. Sports was so – well, working class, except perhaps for the bowl games and the Derby, and maybe that thing with baseball in the autumn, the Series.[30]

Sport did not automatically move into the networks' prime time program schedules; it was too vulgar. And at both CBS and NBC sport was for a long time the responsibility of the networks' news divisions; divisions that did not conceive of sport as terribly important. This situation shares many similarities with the one in Sweden.

Televised Sport and Cultural Change

The winter Olympics of 1960 was exciting for the participants and for their supporters. But it was not a significant event outside that particular community. Today winter Olympics – as televised, global events – are important; important for sport, for national identity, for television – and for business. And they have become important precisely due to the interaction between sport and television. CBS purchased the rights to the 1960 winter Olympics for 50 000 dollars.[31] The rights for the 2000 Sydney games together with the next four games cost NBC 3 billion dollars!

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races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar" (1948/1962:31).

[30] Powers, 1984:45. Paley was president of CBS, Sarnoff of NBC.

[31] Barnett, 1990:38.

Televised sport is today situated in a radically different context than it was in 1960. The technical problems of 1960 are gone. But independent decisions concerning what to show and how have become more difficult to make. The sport/media complex has moved to a global, interconnected level and external actors, such as multinational corporations, have joined the game.

And the genre is changing. Sport events are increasingly fictionalized and they take the form of spectacle. These tendencies are not surprising. To a certain extent they can be deduced from the logic of contemporary global, commercial deregularized television. In an attempt to attract as many viewers as possible, TV programs need to be something special; they need to have that something that gives the viewers a guarantee of immediate satisfaction. And in order to guarantee this satisfaction, programs need to have an ingredient of "reality" – but a reality that is reshaped to fit viewer expectations of excitement, drama and – possibly – happy endings. And this is not exclusive to sport programs. This is basically the same way that news is treated. Or the way that experiences of "real" people are remade into docu-dramas.

In the specific case of sport, this means that the actual sport event either takes a back seat to the events surrounding it – pre-game shows, opening ceremonies, commercials, etc – or that the sport event is presented in a way that makes the experience of viewing it radically different from the experience of being present at the event (events in the Olympics that are broken up by the showing of a two minute documentary of the incredible life history of one of the participants). It also means that sports and athletes are presented in a sanitized way. There is an attempt to stay away from sport's darker sides – drugs, sexism, domestic violence, etc. The logic of television determines the television production rather than the logic of sport.

There is furthermore a tendency in which this television logic also impacts upon the event itself. All major American sport events are shown on American television. When there is a break in an event due to a time-out or an injury, commercials are shown. But the game cannot start again until the

commercials are finished. Even more crucially, rules of the games are changed in order to make the games more appealing to viewers – meaning, primarily, making the games simpler and faster.

I have discussed how the genre is changing. But I have also tried to make clear that it is necessary with a concrete historical-cultural perspective on this change. It is taking place within widely different contexts. And these contexts matter; televised sport still looks quite different in Swedish, British and American television.

But these contexts are also changing. And the results of the changes are not always easy to predict. Swedish public service television has become more commercial due to the competition from other television stations; today sport on public service television in Sweden is mixed with entertainment in an attempt to attract a wider audience. That is only to be expected. But the sport division has also become better at carrying out critical news journalism. And this is to a large extent due to having competitors. The arrival of the commercially financed TV3 and TV4 has not only made the sport division more entertainment focused; it has also made the division sharper – more news focused.

Maybe it is here the real fascination with televised sport lies. Despite attempts to the contrary, it is unpredictable. The genre is difficult to contain even within a news-entertainment-drama trichotomy. Such a genre is constantly interesting.

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