SPORT AND SOCIETY

Plenty of bottle: dimensions of crime and sport

Victor Jupp

In July 1995 John Major announced a Government policy statement entitled *Sport: Raising the Game*. This followed a report, published the preceding year, which suggested that all secondary schools should be required to teach at least five team games - cricket, soccer, rugby, netball and hockey - and also to take part in league and cup competitions. Part of the aim of this proposal is to improve the country's sporting prowess by the establishment of a British Academy of Sport to nurture future international stars. More fundamental, however, is the assertion that the participation of the young in sport, especially at school, is vital not just to the physical health of the nation but also to its social and moral welfare. Sport is portrayed as a means of directing the physical energy and aggressiveness of the young into socially beneficial channels (and by implication away from anti-social behaviour). It is also viewed as a means of encouraging qualities of self discipline, dedication and team spirit and working with others.

The use of sport and of physical activity to deal with the problem of 'revolting youths' is, of course, not new. The reform movement of mid-Victorian Britain set great store by vigorous sport as a mechanism by which the moral and physical condition of the poor could be improved. Thomas Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby School between 1828 and 1842, introduced the game of rugby to control bullying, drunkenness and other anti-social behaviour amongst the boys by instilling personal and social discipline, self esteem and teamwork.

In to the early twentieth century social reformers continued to encourage sport amongst the young as an antidote to the potential evils of urban life. The development of school P.T. (physical training, as opposed to P.E., which is physical education) was linked to the notions of work and discipline. In some contexts, especially those for the offender, there was a deliberate pun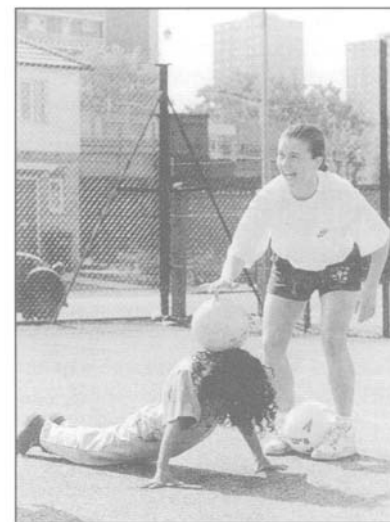itive element. For example, in approved schools and borstals, physical recreation was highly regimented and disciplined and was akin to the development of work skills. Post war Britain witnessed a decline in punitive aspects with a swing towards the constructive elements of sport, although within those elements remained the notions of character building, self discipline and moral esteem.

Sport and crime control

So what of today? Apart from school sport there are programmes linking sport to crime control - either directly or indirectly - which, in the main, are constructive in character (although recently there have been suggestions of a return to a more punitive element, for example in the form of boot camps). First, there are programmes which are explicitly concerned with *rehabilitation of offenders in the community*. For example, the West Yorkshire Sports Counselling Service uses sport as a vehicle to provide counselling to offenders who have been given community service orders. Other programmes bring together *offenders and non-offenders*. For example, a number of police forces take young offenders

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and non-offenders from inner city areas to outward bound centres in more rural surrounds. The police also play a part in *programmes for the community* as a whole or for sections of the community. In some cases, these may be geared to fostering relations between the police and the young in disadvantaged communities or to keep the young active and 'off the streets' at a time, for instance during school holidays, when rates for certain kinds of crimes rise. In Northumbria for example, police officers became active in organising and participating in sports in Meadow Well after the 1991 riots. The Staffordshire Experiment (SPACE) was aimed at increasing the type and number of non-

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criminal opportunities available to those at risk of offending and also sought to establish a close positive relationship between the young and the police.

Many other organisations are also involved in sport as a crime control strategy. Perhaps one of the most important and significant aspects is the development of sports and leisure facilities as part of *community development*, especially in disadvantaged areas and in some cases after instances of major public disorder. Such developments can bring together a wide range of national and local authorities, statutory and voluntary. Finally, at a national level there are proposals for *enhanced provision of core team games in schools* geared to the displacement of surplus energy and aggression and to the development of citizenship via character building. *Sport: Raising the Game* is the most recent flagship of this.

This presents a picture of variety and fragmentation in terms of the targets of such programmes (individuals, the community), aims (rehabilitation, diversion) and organisation (local, national, partnership). There is also variety in terms of the theoretical underpinnings of such schemes. The idea of redirecting energies and aggression smacks of Herbert Spencer's surplus energy theory and the idea of keeping kids off the streets by organising games with policemen owes much to administrative criminology. Despite this variety such schemes and proposals collect around one banner - one carrying the message that sport is good for society.

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The viewpoint is that sport develops values and skills vital to citizenship and also serves as an antidote to crime and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

Sport-crime equation

One way of examining the validity of such claims and the efficacy of programmes founded on them is by evaluation research. Unfortunately research findings from evaluation studies provide little assistance. In the main, statistical findings provide no support for the argument that sport and participation in sport are effective mechanisms of crime control. But that is as much to do with the methodological problems of research design and of controlling variables as with anything else. After all there is very little clear cut evidence that any crime control strategy is effective.

Another way of looking at the claims is by examining their plausibility. In this context it can be done by turning round the sport-crime equation. Metaphorically, this is equivalent to turning from Major's plans for sport on the front page of the newspaper to the back page where in the past year we could have found stories of footballers taking drop kicks at spectators, managers taking 'bungs', cricketers 'throwing matches', athletes taking drugs, spectators starting riots and goalkeepers 'dropping balls'. This is

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hardly the epitome of good citizenship.

It can be, and has been argued that those who engage in such activities are in a minority and in any case confined to professional sport. However, when observing a junior football match it is possible to see youngsters (and sometimes their parents on the touchline) having a good time but also engaging in an aggressive and occasionally violent activity. You might also see a football scout making a discreet note of a

The Railway Arch Team in kid funded by the DIVERT 'Communities and Football' Initiative

youngster's name because 'he's got plenty of bottle' (which involves a willingness to risk life and limb to win the ball from another youngster with total disregard for *his* life and limb).

Transferable skills

There is a sporting irony, even paradox, in all of this. On the one hand sport is the context for that which is bad in us and in society - sleaze, corruption, fraud, violence and aggression - and at the same time it is portrayed as the fountain of that which is good and the panacea of social ills. It is intriguing that some of the core features of sport such as competitiveness, desire to win, desire for success, aggressiveness and assertiveness underpin criminal actions such as violence, assault, sleaze and fraud. And yet these self-same features are held up as character forming and as justification for sporting programmes to encourage citizenship and to combat crime.

What is more it is not just that activities take place within the context of sport. There is potential for 'transfer activity'. As John McVicar (Guardian, 19 Sept 1995) has pointed out, the core features of physical sport involve transferable skills appropriate to a successful criminal career outside of a sporting context. Many a useful sportsman has turned out to be an even more useful villain.

The sport-crime connection is complex and has many dimensions. There is ample scope for research on crime and sport in terms of its nature, extent and major 'players'. There is also potential for theorising about how and why crime

exists in sport, for example in terms of masculinity or social background (crime as brought into sport), the social organisation of sport (crime as the outcome of organisation features) and core features of sporting activity (crime as the outcome of say, aggressiveness or desire to win), and interactions between these. Further, an analysis of skills 'transferable' from sport and crime would be intriguing. Finally, there is work to be done in examining the efficacy of sports programmes to reduce crime. This should not be done solely within the boundaries of before-after evaluation studies but also in the context of a wider examination of the sport-crime equation. In particular, the question should be asked, "what is the significance of crime in sport, its manifestations and its explanations, for the efficacy of sports programmes to reduce crime?"

An examination of the policies and strategies regarding sport and crime is inevitably treated as criticism. However, that is to confuse criticism, in the everyday sense of the word, with critical analysis. It is also sometime viewed as an argument for rejecting governmental involvement in sport. That is not the case. All involvement should be encouraged but in the context of recognising sport as a meaningful activity for lots of different groups across lots of social divides and not just a means of producing a team of 'good chaps'. ∎

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