Sport and society
by Greg Ryan

As early as the 1830s British settlers were organising horse races and cricket matches. The range of available sporting activities grew with the population, and sport became vital to Kiwi culture.

Old world origins

Competitive sports such as running races, ball games and wrestling have long been a part of many societies, as a way of testing the physical qualities of individuals and bringing communities together.

However, the origins of most modern sports can be traced to British society during the 18th and 19th centuries. New Zealand was predominantly settled by the British at the same time as the ‘games revolution’ was occurring in Britain – a period of change which coincided with the industrial revolution, and saw sports and games become generally more organised and orderly.

Older British sports such as cricket, horse racing and rowing were quickly established and New Zealand was only slightly behind Britain in taking up newly organised sports such as rugby and tennis.

Origins of modern sport

In pre-industrial English society the nobility had the time and wealth for sports such as hunting, but the majority of people played sport only when work patterns allowed, such as after the busy harvest period, or on religious holidays.

Most games were local, and the rules seldom written down. Local varieties of football were staged in and around the village rather than on measured fields, and were marked by landmarks such as trees or churches.

The American difference

The United States declared its independence from Britain in 1776, before organised sport became firmly established in Britain. As a result, American sporting culture produced its own unique games such as baseball, rather than cricket, and American football, rather than rugby or association football.
From the 18th century industrial growth drew people from villages to towns for factory and other work. Common rules had to be developed if people were to play sport together. The new industries required regular working hours. Sport was therefore confined to certain times each week, especially Saturday afternoons.

A religious Puritanism and a ‘civilising process’, which encouraged a more orderly, sober and disciplined society, did not tolerate the wilder excesses of traditional sports. Local authorities, seeking to discipline their growing urban populations, suppressed uncontrolled folk football along with blood sports such as animal fighting.

Rules and competitions

Some sports, such as boxing, cricket, horse racing and rowing, became more organised from the early 18th century because they attracted support from a wealthy and influential elite who gambled large sums on the outcome of matches. Gambling required the creation of common rules to avoid disputes between both players and gamblers.

Organised sport also began to take hold within the elite British public boys’ schools, as headmasters realised that controlled leisure time outside the classroom could teach boys the values of cooperation and good behaviour, helpful in life beyond school. The public schools shaped traditional forms of football into predominantly handling games (rugby) and kicking games (soccer or football).

Class divisions

During the 19th century regular working hours, more disposable income, improved transport networks and a growing sporting press produced a following for sport among the urban working class.

Sport remained sharply divided along class or amateur and professional lines. The emerging distinction between those who played for pay (professionals) and those who played for pleasure (amateurs) kept working-class influence to a minimum.

Some sports, especially rowing and rugby, imposed strict definitions of amateurism that excluded many working-class participants who were unable to play without some form of payment. Other sports, cricket and football in particular, allowed professionalism in a way that was strictly controlled by amateur administrations.
Sport comes to New Zealand

First events

Details of the first organised sporting event in European New Zealand are not certain. The earliest recorded game of cricket, which involved the children of English settlers and almost certainly some Māori players, was at Paihia in the Bay of Islands on 20 December 1832. The earliest organised horse racing was probably held in the Bay of Islands in 1835, with the first race meeting in Auckland in early 1840 under the direction of Lieutenant Governor William Hobson.

Regular sport was an important feature of the increasing European settlement after 1840, especially on occasions such as settlement anniversary days and the Queen’s birthday.

Anniversary days

The anniversary days and other public gatherings of the 1840s and 1850s were mixtures of competitive sport and traditional village activities, influenced by the uniquely New Zealand setting.

Events in Wellington on 22 January 1842 included sailing and rowing races, a hurdle race, climbing a greasy pole, catching a soap-tailed pig by its tail (the prize being the pig), a one-mile foot race and a rifle match. Prize money and rules for each event were published in local newspapers beforehand.

The first ‘Anniversary Sports Meeting’ in Dunedin in March 1849 included rowing races for various types of boats, including a ‘Maori boat race’, along with numerous athletic contests such as sprints, hurdles, a wheel-barrow race, putting the stone, hammer throwing, caber tossing and a ‘sword dance’.

In Auckland in the 1840s the anniversary was marked by horse races and a regatta on the harbour. The first two Canterbury Anniversary Day celebrations, in 1851 and 1852, featured cricket, quoits, foot and horse races, a sack race, a hurdle race, a shooting match, a greased pig and a soaped pole.

Purposes of sport

Sport was encouraged to provide reassuring features of ‘home’ in a new colony, to create social harmony, and to develop discipline and cooperation among players. But sporting growth was not always straightforward. Often clubs were founded and events staged during the enthusiasm of the first

Sport for life

From the beginning, those encouraging sport in New Zealand saw it as good for success in life.
Edward Gibbon Wakefield, founder of the colonising New Zealand Company, wrote in 1850, ‘I tell the
few years of settlement, only to fade over the next decade or so, as more immediate demands took over.

Emergence of clubs

Perhaps the first organised sports club in New Zealand was a short-lived Wellington Jockey Club established early in 1842. There were also two cricket clubs in the settlement by the end of the same year – a Wellington Cricket Club for prominent colonists and officials and an Albion Cricket Club for working men.

Other cricket and racing clubs were established in Auckland, Whanganui and Wellington throughout the 1840s and in Dunedin and Christchurch from the early 1850s. Most lasted only a year or two.

Sport and the military

In the North Island, the military presence was crucial to the growth of sport. Military garrison settlements, some of which would eventually become established towns such as Hamilton and Te Awamutu, encouraged athletics, cricket and other sports for both recreation and discipline.

Footnotes


What makes a team?

As there was only one cricket club in most settlements, fixtures had to be arranged within the club between different groups. Such matches included married against single; surnames A to L against M to Z; tall against short; and the best XI of the club against the next XVIII or XXII. At other times the clubs played against outside teams such as butchers, bakers, publicans, visiting ships’ crews and military garrisons.

Growth, 1860s and 1870s

Gold and commercialisation

The dramatic increase in population following the gold discoveries of the 1860s and the immigration schemes of the 1870s improved the level and regularity of participation, the variety of sports on offer and the commercial opportunities.

Athletics, cricket and horse racing in particular took root in the new goldfields towns, and cricket thrived with financial backing from publicans eager to attract clientele to their establishments. In 1862 Dunedin publicans organised billiards matches with as much as £500 at stake. A network of managers, agents and trainers emerged on the
goldfields willing to assist, or exploit talented athletes trying to supplement their gold earnings.

Hotels were a common venue for teams to gather before and after games and for sporting bodies to hold committee meetings.

**New venues**

In 1864 Dunedin entrepreneur Shadrach Jones brought George Parr’s All England cricket team from Australia for matches against Canterbury and Otago in January. It was the first international contact for New Zealand sport, and in New Zealand it pioneered the idea of an enclosed ground to which spectators could be charged admission.

At the same time the elite Canterbury Jockey Club, established in 1854, erected a stone grandstand with seating for 400 on its course at Riccarton. Its premier event, the Canterbury Cup, offered a stake of £1,000 by 1866.

**The middle class takes over**

In cricket and horse racing, and to a lesser extent in rowing, the leading clubs now had continuity, with good facilities and sometimes very strict rules regarding members’ dress and conduct. They began to exert an influence over New Zealand sport, in the main towns at least, that was consistent with the ideals of the English middle class and the public school sporting tradition. They were less tolerant of the working-class sporting culture that had dominated the early 1860s, with its elements of gambling and professionalism.

**Football takes hold**

The 1860s saw the emergence of various football codes and eventually rugby union, which became the dominant winter sport in New Zealand by the end of the 19th century.

The earliest reference to football of any kind seems to be an informal game among children after a dinner for military pensioners in Auckland in October 1847. Football of some sort was also part of the anniversary celebrations in Christchurch as early as 1854.

Properly organised games do not appear until the early 1860s, at the same time as the diverse local codes in Britain were being refined as rugby and association football (soccer). Organised football, based on the rules of Radley School, which were closer in
structure to soccer, was played at Christ’s College, Christchurch, in 1862. The Christchurch Football Club was formed in 1863.

The recently developed Melbourne game of Victorian (later ‘Australian’) rules football was introduced to the Otago and Thames goldfields by miners crossing the Tasman. It continued to enjoy some popularity in mining communities until the early 20th century. However, from 1870 it was overshadowed by the introduction of rugby to Nelson, then Wellington, and eventually much further afield with the 1875 tour of the Auckland provincial team throughout the colony.

National sports

During the last three decades of the 19th century sporting codes became national institutions. There were three major drivers:

- transport improvements
- the need to organise local and provincial competitions
- the need to organise international contests.

Transport improvements

From the 1870s improved coastal shipping and the spread of railways and telegraph communication made it easier for the sports participants of the main settlements to come together. Canterbury and Otago began an annual fixture in cricket as early as 1864. Rugby and rowing initiated interprovincial contacts from the 1870s, and there were national tournaments in bowls, rifle shooting, tennis and other sports from the 1880s.

Provincial organisations

To facilitate interprovincial fixtures and administer local competitions, provincial organisations were needed. It began with cricket – provincial associations were formed in Wellington in 1875, Otago in 1876 and Canterbury in 1877. Rugby unions followed with Canterbury and Wellington in 1879, Otago in 1881, Auckland in 1883 and 14 more throughout New Zealand by 1893. Before long there was pressure for national bodies.

International sport

Surprise visitors

The first interprovincial sporting contest in New Zealand resulted from the unexpected arrival of an Auckland cricket team in Wellington in March 1860. On an unprepared ground, and with several of their best players out of town, Wellington lost by four wickets.
Improvements in transport, along with the growing population, stimulated increased international contact.

Overseas teams in New Zealand

The first sports team from overseas to tour New Zealand was George Parr’s All England cricket team, which extended its tour of Australia for matches against Canterbury and Otago in January 1864.

Another English team toured in 1877, followed by one from Australia in 1878. New South Wales rugby teams toured in 1882 and 1886, and a British team arrived in 1888. Rugby and cricket tours were regular events from then on.

Australian athletics, soccer, swimming and tennis teams were touring New Zealand by the early 20th century, as well as professional athletes and cyclists from Australia, Britain and the United States.

New Zealand competes overseas

New Zealand horses were sent to compete in Australian races from the late 1850s.

The first sports team to tour overseas was a Canterbury cricket team, which played in Victoria early in 1879. A representative New Zealand rugby team toured Australia in 1884 and the New Zealand Native team embarked on a gruelling tour of Australia and Britain in 1888.

A number of New Zealand athletes, boxers and rowers also performed well overseas from the late 1880s.

These international contests required national organisations to arrange tours and pick representative teams. Almost all of the national administrative bodies for men’s sport were formed during the two decades after 1885, as the standard of communication between the four main cities and some of the larger provincial towns further improved. All of these bodies were based in the main cities, with the brief exception of the Lawn Tennis Association, which started life in Napier before moving to Christchurch.

Rugby takes over

Cricket was the ‘national game’ in New Zealand until the late 19th century, in the sense that it was the most widely played sport, and was probably only surpassed by horse racing for spectator interest. However, it was eventually overtaken by rugby in terms of participation and interest. Although the two sports were not in direct competition as one took place in summer and the other in winter, the consistent international success
of New Zealand rugby teams compared to the consistent failure of its cricket teams soon captured greater public imagination.

The limits of sporting participation, 1870–1910

The myth

New Zealand was a more egalitarian sporting society than Britain. Distinctions between amateurs and professionals were not as rigorously adhered to and new settlers were less inclined to accept an inferior status in sport. But the idea of New Zealand as a sporting paradise for all during the 19th century has limits. New Zealand geography, working conditions, access to education, and ideas about gender and race all restricted the sporting opportunities available to colonial New Zealanders.

The urban advantage

From the 1870s the concentration of population, resources and finance in the four main cities – and the larger provincial towns – allowed regular inter-club competitions in many sports to develop. But most New Zealanders were rural people and this made sporting participation more difficult for many. Even in 1911 only 34.2% of Pākehā lived in the four main centres and their surrounding suburbs, while well over two-fifths lived on farms or in towns of less than 1,000. The Māori population was almost entirely rural.

There was no shortage of sporting enthusiasm in the early years of most small country settlements, but many of their clubs, and especially their attempts to establish inter-community competitions, were undermined by small population, isolation and difficult travel.

After enthusiastic public support during the 1870s and 1880s Manawatū rugby went into decline during the 1890s. The Manawatu Rugby Football Union did not function during the period from 1899 to 1902. After its revival there was not sufficient strength for any more than four senior teams, and in 1913 the union’s senior competition was abandoned with three rounds remaining – due to the dominance of the Feilding club over the other three.

Working hours and conditions

Now you play, now you don’t
Working hours and conditions restricted opportunities to play sport for many ordinary people. Until the 20th century many were engaged in seasonal work in rural areas and moved from job to job. This was especially true of young, single males, who made up the largest part of the sporting community. Therefore many sports clubs and community competitions struggled to maintain regular participants.

Many workers, especially rural labourers, did not have a half-day holiday during the week until well into the 20th century. Those people who did have a holiday often used it for washing and other chores, in order to keep Sunday free for rest and recreation. Prevailing religious beliefs meant that organised sport was generally not allowed on Sunday until at least the late 1960s.

Legislation such as the Shops and Shop-assistants Act 1894 and the Shops and Offices Act Amendment Act 1905 (allowing a weekly half holiday beginning at 1 p.m., and requiring all commercial offices to close no later than 5 p.m. on weekdays and 1 p.m. on Saturdays) increased recreational opportunities for some workers, especially those in towns. But the benefits to sporting participation from a Saturday afternoon holiday and an eight-hour working day did not become widespread until after the First World War.

Education and sport

The elite were important in starting sporting codes and competitions because they had the time and money to travel for games. The elite boys’ schools such as Christ’s College and Auckland Grammar School devoted time to organised sport, imitating their English public-school counterparts.

These schools were strongly committed to amateurism. Auckland Grammar alone provided at least one-third of all Auckland provincial representative cricketers before 1914. At least a quarter of the All Black team members selected before 1914 attended secondary school.

However, in 1900 there were only 25 secondary schools in New Zealand and they were attended by about 3% of the eligible age group. This increased to 25% by 1939. Most pupils left after six years of primary school, and before the First World War the primary schools focused on military-style physical drill and physical education rather than organised sport.

Ethnicity and gender in sport, 1860–1910
Māori engagement with Pākehā sport

Māori were involved in many early anniversary day celebrations and other community sports gatherings, and some observers felt that this was important to the process of developing harmonious race relations.

But, contrary to popular myths that ‘naturally athletic’ Māori quickly accepted Pākehā sports, and especially rugby, the evidence for widespread participation during the 19th century is not convincing. A study of Akaroa suggests that Māori participation declined as the scale of colonisation increased and conflicts between Pākehā and Māori intensified.

Those Māori who did participate at club and provincial level had generally been educated in the Pākehā school system and their regular contacts with Pākehā were not those of most Māori. It is also probable that they were drawn from those tribes who had been most cooperative with and loyal to the Crown during the New Zealand wars.

For many other Māori, especially in the central and northern North Island, contact with Pākehā in general, let alone their sport, was at a minimum until the late 19th century.

Gender and sport

Women and girls faced specific barriers to sporting participation. Although colonial women generally enjoyed wider opportunities than their British counterparts, these were largely within their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers. For most of the 19th century women supported the male sporting community. They launched boats, donated trophies, provided food for participants and offered a civilising and festive atmosphere by their presence as spectators.

Opposition to women’s sport was based mainly on flimsy medical ideas that vigorous exercise would damage their ability to have and raise children. The common view that women should behave with modesty and gentility counted against their involvement in games that were seen as ungraceful and unfeminine. There was also the practical impediment: their skirts and tight sleeves restricted movement for all but the most sedate exercise.

The development of higher education for New Zealand women during the late 19th century, and the growing recognition that healthy rather than delicate bodies helped women fulfil their roles in society, gradually

Anniversary Day race relations

A Wellington newspaper reported on Anniversary Day sports in 1847: ‘Another feature, and to us not the least interesting one, was the number of natives present, who appeared equally disposed with the settlers to participate in and enjoy the diversions of the annual holiday. The occasion is perhaps of greater importance to them than to us, as the attempt to colonise New Zealand must have the most material influence on their improvement and civilisation, and opportunities like the present display the good feeling existing between the two races’. 1
led to an acceptance of some physical activity. But the sports that were largely tolerated for women were those, such as tennis, croquet and golf, which could be pursued as social rather than competitive activities, or within a school or family setting away from public view.

Swimming also became acceptable in the early 20th century because it was easy to segregate women from men.

When women did begin to play team sports during the same period, they opted for those sports, such as hockey, that were less associated with displays of masculinity. Netball, which arrived around 1906, was regarded as the ideal sport for women. It did not involve physical contact or require significant space. Nor was it a challenge to anything men did. Women’s cricket grew slowly, while participation in any of the football codes was strongly discouraged until later in the 20th century.

Footnotes

- New Zealand Spectator and Cook’s Strait Guardian, 23 January 1847, p.2. Back

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**Popular participation, 1910–1970**

**Growth in participation**

Improved transport and communications and the steady growth of city populations ensured greater continuity and wider participation in New Zealand sports from the early 20th century.

International success, especially the 1905–6 and 1924–25 All Black rugby teams in Britain, and the racehorse Phar Lap’s success from 1930 to 1932, ensured the dominance of a few major sports such as rugby and horse racing across all classes.

For New Zealand boys, playing rugby became a mark of national citizenship. A survey in the 1925 New Zealand official year-book reveals that rugby was the most popular sport, as measured by club membership. It was followed by horse racing, tennis, bowls, golf, athletics, cricket, hockey, swimming and soccer (association football).

The basic ‘pyramid’ structure of New Zealand team sport saw players progressing in decreasing numbers from school to club to provincial to national teams. This structure
dominated for much of the 20th century, as obstacles to sporting participation were gradually overcome.

Factors that helped make sport more accessible included: shorter working hours (particularly the establishment of a non-working Saturday from 1945); greater access to secondary schooling after the Second World War; improved transport networks and especially the significant expansion in the number of private cars.

Individualistic non-team sports such as hunting, mountaineering, skiing and tramping benefited from easier access to the outdoors for an increasingly urban population. The new transport options became sports in their own right, as forms of motor racing grew in popularity from the 1920s.

Basketball and softball gained momentum from the presence of American servicemen in New Zealand during the Second World War.

Regional variation

There were some significant regional variations in sporting activities, reflecting different origins among the settlers. In Otago and Southland, and at Waipū in Northland, there were strong Caledonian Societies encouraging Highland Games. The Cornish style of wrestling remained popular in areas such as the West Coast of the South Island where Cornish farmers and miners settled. The ‘ten pound Poms’ who immigrated after the Second World War brought an interest in association football – strong in areas like the North Shore where they settled in large numbers.

When rugby league became established in the early 20th century it attracted followers from the working class, especially in Auckland and mining communities in Waikato and the West Coast. Sports such as wood-chopping, shearing and horse-riding took off in rural communities, often with the encouragement of local agricultural and pastoral (A & P) shows. Yachting was strong in Auckland with its magnificent harbour.

Bowls, boxing, cycling, golf, gymnastics, hockey, lacrosse, pigeon racing, polo, rifle shooting, swimming, tennis and other sports also had dedicated followers, and periodically attracted substantial public interest for their championships or when leading exponents visited from overseas.

Footnotes

Spectators and revenue

As populations grew and became concentrated in cities and larger towns, sporting organisations were increasingly able to generate revenue by charging spectators in those places to attend top-level competitions.

During the 1920s there were many grandstands built at major grounds, and by the 1950s the largest stadiums, such as Eden Park in Auckland and Lancaster Park in Christchurch, could accommodate more than 50,000 people.

Tours by international sporting teams and talented individuals drew large crowds and awoke public interest. These included Indian hockey teams in 1926, 1935 and 1938; a Chinese football team in 1924; an English women’s cricket team in 1935; tours by the South African Springbok rugby team in 1921, 1937 and 1956; and regular visits by the English Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) team.

In smaller towns numerous smaller grounds and sporting spaces were established by both sports bodies and local councils, who sought to provide recreational opportunities for their own expanding populations.

Improved transport, especially cars, allowed spectators to travel some distance to watch important club and provincial games on Saturday afternoons. Money from spectatorship and from emerging commercial sponsorship (breweries and cigarette companies in particular) enabled a larger number of provincial and national teams to travel within New Zealand and overseas.

Sport and radio

From the 1920s live radio broadcasts of sport, especially cricket, rugby and horse racing, further consolidated public interest. While some administrators worried that sport on radio would discourage spectators from attending games, the reverse was the case. Radio commentary encouraged more people to go along.

Rugby commentators like Winston McCarthy and horse-race callers like Dave Clarkson became household names. The popularity of wrestling during the 1930s, including visits from a number of overseas stars, was a notable example of a sport that boosted its following from radio coverage. From the 1940s audiences were able to hear live broadcasts from major events overseas, and follow the fortunes of New Zealand touring teams.

Watching the Boks

The 1956 Springbok tour of New Zealand was probably the high point in mass attendance at sport in New Zealand. People slept on pavements outside the gates, desperate to get in first and grab a good vantage point. Around 31,000 people watched Waikato defeat the Springboks in the first game. (Hamilton’s population was just over 40,000.) In Poverty Bay, around 20,000 watched them play. (Gisborne’s population was 22,000.) And 61,240 crowded into Eden Park for the fourth test in Auckland.
Television

The introduction of sport on New Zealand television from the early 1960s brought about more fundamental changes. From 1967 All Blacks test matches were televised, and satellites allowed live international sport, including the Olympics, to be viewed in New Zealand from 1972. Colour television arrived in time for the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch.

Not only did television bring New Zealanders closer to top-level sporting performances, but it gave a much wider audience to previously minor sports such as snooker (from the 1970s) and basketball (from the early 1980s). It also generated a substantial following for America’s Cup yachting from the late 1980s among people who otherwise had no experience of yachts.

Television has also changed spectator habits, in that the dedicated still tend to go to games while less committed followers can satisfy their interest from home.

Professional sport

Betting

As the 20th century progressed, opposition to professional sport and to links with gambling gradually receded. New Zealand’s Totalisator Agency Board (TAB) opened its doors in 1951, in an effort to control widespread and unregulated betting on horse racing. It was the first off-course betting agency in the world.

Although the location of premises and the extent of racing information that the TAB could supply to punters were initially strictly controlled, betting came to be seen as a normal rather than a clandestine activity. From 1996 the TAB extended its activities to allow betting on team sport.

Professional sportspeople

Improved international air travel and communication from the 1960s enabled more New Zealand sportspeople to compete and earn professionally overseas. Of particular note were Denny Hulme, Chris Amon and Bruce McLaren in motor racing; Ronnie Moore and Ivan Mauger in speedway; and Bob Charles in golf.

Professional attitudes, as well as different training and coaching methods, gradually filtered back to a still predominantly amateur New Zealand sporting culture that sometimes struggled to accept them. Professional cricketers, such as Glenn Turner and
to an extent Richard Hadlee, had periodic confrontations with the conservative administration of New Zealand cricket as they sought to pursue careers in England.

Rugby union refused to make any concession to professionalism until the early 1990s, prompting a steady trickle of players to defect to professional rugby league opportunities in Australia and England. Only in 1995 did rugby union join the other major sports in fully embracing professionalism.

Athletics recognised professionalism in 1981. By the 2000s elite athletes in a range of disciplines were being supported financially by High Performance Sport New Zealand, which provided financial assistance for coaching, technology, facilities and grants to sportspeople in six Olympic sports plus cricket, netball and rugby.

New competitions

From the 1990s professional trans-Tasman sporting competitions emerged, which heightened public interest and widened professional sport. In 1995 a New Zealand rugby league team, the Warriors, joined the Australian Rugby League competition. The next year Super Rugby began involving five New Zealand teams playing Australian and South African teams.

A New Zealand team played in Australia’s National Soccer League (NSL) from 1999, and since 2004 has played in the A-League. The New Zealand Breakers joined the Australasian National Basketball League in 2003, and five netball teams from New Zealand have participated in the ANZ Trans-Tasman Championship since 2007.

International competitions also emerged, bringing a new professionalism and interest to some sports. These included the World Netball Championship (from 1963), the Cricket World Cup (from 1975) and the Rugby World Cup (from 1987).

Effects on spectatorship

The proliferation of international professional sport on television, especially following the introduction of Sky’s pay television service, with dedicated sports channels from 1992, encouraged some people to watch sport on television rather than attend.

Extreme sports, ice hockey, kayaking, korfbal and snowboarding are among many sports that have benefited from exposure to a wider audience. But the lack of sport on free-to-air television potentially limited audiences, and the major sports began to keep patrons watching by promoting

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<td>In the drive to professionalise sport, teams were given catchy nicknames in place of their geographical labels. National teams became Black Sticks (hockey), Silver Ferns (netball), Black Caps and White Ferns (both cricket), Black Sox and White Sox (both softball), Black Ferns (rugby) and Tall Blacks (basketball). They all imitated the long-established All Blacks. Meanwhile local teams took names including Highlanders,</td>
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new forms of their games, such as sevens rugby and Twenty20 cricket.

Attendance at games dropped from pre-television days. At the older grounds the standing banks were eliminated, and they became all seating. Elsewhere new stadiums were built. Prices rose and there were increasing privileges for members. Arguably traditional team sports such as cricket and rugby did not have quite the spectator following they once had.

Changing times, 1980s onwards

Challenges to grassroots participation

The expansion of international professional sport had an impact on patterns of sporting participation from the 1980s.

While sports sometimes increased their player numbers as a result of major events being on television, the emphasis on elite sport undermined the traditional importance of the local club. The club role in sending talent to the next level was weakened by sports academies in schools, a significant increase in age-group tournaments, talent identification programmes in most sports and scholarship opportunities to overseas universities.

There is also evidence that participation and club membership among all sports declined in favour of sedentary leisure activities such as watching films, live performance and television, and, more recently, internet use. Changes to weekend and evening trading hours also affected participation in team sports as many people were required to work on Saturday or Sunday. Increases in both single-parent and two-career families challenged the notion of the weekend as a time for team sport.

The rise of individualism

Generational change may have influenced sporting preferences. Those whose social habits were shaped by experiences of war and economic depression were succeeded by generations without the same need to cooperate. They were less community-focused. Team and club memberships declined.

By the early 21st century changing lifestyles resulted in a stronger emphasis on individualism and a greater interest in those sports that took less time or offered flexibility in when they could be undertaken. Walking, cycling, swimming, gardening and going to the gym became more popular ways of gaining fitness.
At the beginning of the 21st century a survey revealed that the top five sports for all adults were golf, tennis, touch rugby, cricket and netball. Rugby union had slipped to ninth place, while horse racing struggled for widespread active support on all but the major racing occasions.

Gender

At the end of the 20th century, in a number of sports such as cricket and rugby, the formerly separate administration of women and men’s sport came together and this helped funnel additional funding to women’s activity. There was increasing interest and participation in women’s sport as a result, and there was wide participation in sports like touch rugby, where women played with men.

Māori and Pacific dominance

Since the 1980s there has been a disproportionate Māori and Pacific Island presence in team sports such as netball, both rugby codes and softball. This is frequently attributed to superior physical attributes, especially among Māori and Pacific youth, compared to their European counterparts. But there are many sports in which physically strong Polynesians could excel but do not. The likely explanation is that sporting choices are shaped by socio-economic and cultural considerations. Māori and Pacific people pursue a narrower and more traditional range of cheaper sporting choices and have a cultural preference for team rather than individual activities, while European preferences and talent are more dispersed.

External links and sources

More suggestions and sources


More links and websites

Active NZ Survey 2013/2014

This survey provides information on the activities and sporting behaviour of New Zealanders in the early 2000s.

Sport
http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/category/tid/437

The NZHistory website provides a series of excellent essays about different New Zealand sports.


Story by Greg Ryan, published 5 Sep 2013

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