

The expulsion of South Africa from the Olympics in 1964 and 1968 affected world opinion and South Africa's long-standing apartheid. No doubt the resulting publicity pressured a major reform in a government that had repressed black citizens for centuries. Similarly, the People's Republic of China was ostracized for its dismal record on human rights. In a remarkable change, Beijing was chosen as the host city for the Olympic Games in 2008. China believes that its selection shows other nations' stamp of approval on its progress to right the wrongs in the country.

Sport in Promoting Social Values

In the United States, sport is a conservative institution that promotes traditional values and can integrate people into the social construct. Generally, sport strives to maintain the status quo by teaching people mainstream values or perhaps by functioning as a distraction for people who are unsatisfied with their society or lives. Yet sport can also serve as a platform from which to point to the need for change.

In the United States, striving for excellence is a critical social value, and success is measured by achievement. Competition spurs Americans to perform to the maximum of their ability and to reach heights of excellence they may never have thought possible. The American recipe for success is to work hard, show discipline, and stay dedicated to personal goals. There is no shame in defeating or being defeated, for in striving to win against the competitor, both athletes are inspired to perform at their best.

In China, the values learned through sport can be very different. According to writers who studied Chinese attitudes toward sport in the 1970s, the prevailing attitude was not that winning is the ultimate goal. Rather, Chinese competition emphasized cooperation, working toward a group goal, friendship, and physical fitness. There was little emphasis on individual success, and athletes displayed devotion to the success of the group (Johnson 1973a, 1973b, 1973c). Some of those attitudes changed in the decades since, and China has risen to a world power in competitive sport, a power culminating in Beijing's selection to host the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Adults use competitive sport to teach kids the lessons they believe necessary for later success in life. Kids learn that by trying their best to win in

sport, they will develop the life skills to compete in the world. Those skills could also be developed through academic achievement, excellence in arts, or exploration in technology and invention. Yet sports are often the first thing that comes to the minds of people wanting to teach children the right habits for future success.

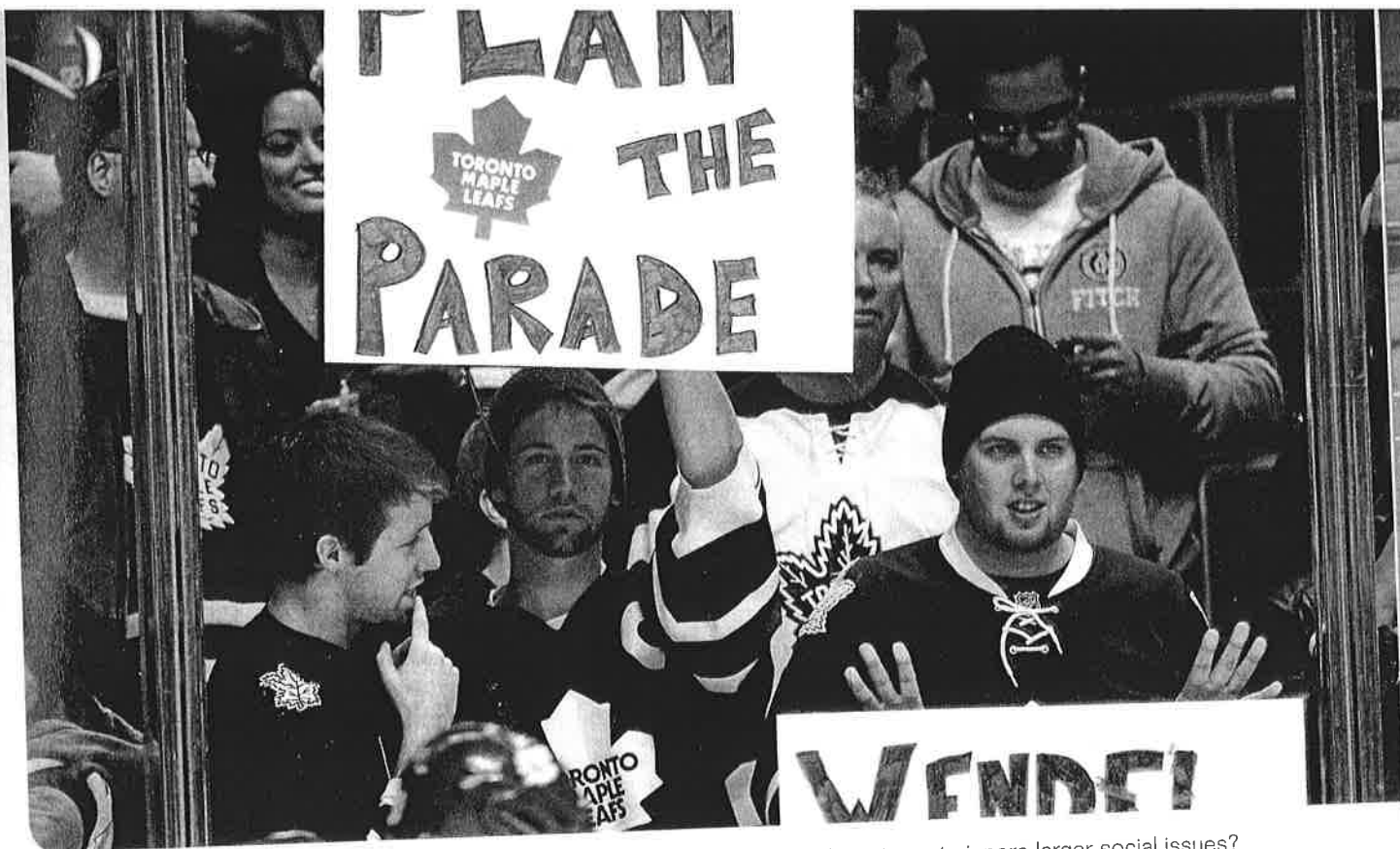
Sports are used throughout the world to socially integrate people from diverse backgrounds. For example, Northern Ireland has extensively invested in sport facilities to promote constructive interaction between Protestants and Catholics. In France, sports are often seen as a way of regenerating French youth and improving social discipline. In many countries, including England and the United States, sports are used to combat urban unrest and to reduce crime and juvenile delinquency (Coakley and Dunning 2004).

Sport as an Opiate of the Masses

Various critics throughout history have charged governments with using sport to distract their citizens from the inequities in their society. These critics charged that the government used sport as an "opiate" to calm the masses, dull their senses, and distract their attention from their everyday social or economic problems. The hype given to sport puts the citizenry to sleep on matters of deeper significance. This charge has typically been leveled at authoritarian governments, especially those in countries with a large number of poor people (Eitzen 2004).

Developing countries have learned to use sport well. Powerful governments in the world's poorest nations have effectively rallied their citizens to support national teams representing their homeland. In most countries, the chosen sport is soccer, or what is referred to as *football* around the globe. Brazil is a good example of a nation that has embraced soccer as a national pastime and elevated its most famous son, Pelé, as a legendary hero. The exploits of the Brazilian soccer team have united rich and poor in a country beset with myriad social and economic tensions. Brazilian pride is stoked by every success fashioned by the national soccer team. Around the world, Brazil is respected for its tradition of excellence in world soccer competition.

Even in the United States, the charge of using sport as a distraction has been made by public figures such as Bill Bradley, a former All-American basketball player for Princeton University and later for the New York Knicks. After his basketball career,



■ Do you think sports enable fans to forget about reality for a while? Is it a way for citizens to ignore larger social issues?

Bradley entered politics and became a U.S. senator. He was also a presidential contender in 2000. In the early days of his political career, he referred to sport as "a temporary fix, an escape from the problems of the world such as war, racism, and poverty that distracts the minds and saps the energies of people away from the problems of the lower classes" (Hoch 1972, p. 12).

Typically, political activists seek changes in their present government by criticizing those in power for diverting attention from critical social problems. A contemporary example is Noam Chomsky, a brilliant political activist and professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Chomsky has been acknowledged as one of the most influential voices in contemporary political discussions and is a left-wing critic of American foreign policy. He believes sport is an opiate of the masses (Tsiokos 2005):

"Sports keeps people from worrying about things that matter to their lives. Sports is a major factor in controlling people. Workers have minds; they have to be involved in something and it's important to make sure they're involved in things that have absolutely no significance. So professional sport is perfect. It instills total passivity."

Social critics ask, How do you explain the American preoccupation with sport when the country still faces racial tensions, discrimination toward women and ethnic groups, a rising national debt, concern for long-term welfare of senior citizens on limited incomes, affordable health care, rising rates of obesity, continued assaults on the environment, and a deepening divide between the so-called red and blue states? Rather than facing a distrustful nation, the U.S. government may find it better to keep its citizens focused on the Super Bowl, the March Madness of college basketball, the start of spring training for baseball, and the next Olympic Games (Huston 2005).

Critics ask why cities spend millions to attract or retain professional sport franchises when those millions could be used to help the poor, build cheap housing, raise teachers' salaries and improve school facilities, fight crime, and provide quality health care.

It may be that people simply choose to focus their energy on more positive events. They may feel powerless or may not know how to address the issues that social critics list as important.

Sport and the Status Quo

Generally in the United States, people associated with sport are politically conservative. These people