Any analysis of sport, sporting events and sports governance must inevitably take into account the historical events which underpin them. For sports researchers, the British Library has an unrivalled collection of resources covering all aspects of the subject and in many different media, from books describing sporting events, to biographies and autobiographies of grass roots and elite athletes; coaching manuals; sport yearbooks and annual reports; directories of athletics clubs; sports periodicals; newspaper reports; and oral history interviews with sports people, including Olympians and Paralympians. These materials cover a long period of sporting activity both in Great Britain and elsewhere in the world.

Some early materials

As a glance at the earliest editions of the British Museum Library subject index show, the term ‘sport’ in the 18th century (and for much of the nineteenth) usually referred to blood sports. Nevertheless the existence of such headings as Rowing, Bowls, Cricket, Football, and Gymnastics in these early indexes point to a longstanding role for sport -as currently understood - in British social life. As was the case in ancient times, sports might originate as forms of preparation for war (from 1338, when the Hundred year’s war with France began, a series of English kings passed laws to make football illegal for fear that it would consume too much of the time set aside for archery practice); but they could also represent the natural human desire for friendly competition, so that alongside the jousting of the elite, games like bowling, stool ball and football could hold important places in the lives of ordinary people. One relatively early commentator on such traditional leisure activities was Joseph Strutt, whose ‘The sports and pastimes of the people of England’ (1830) is an invaluable resource. By the 17th century, in any case, the monarchy had reached an accommodation with the sporting instincts of the British, with the publication of King James I’s The Sports book which listed the sports played by and allowed to his subjects on Sundays and Holy days.

Sporting events have also had a long history in these islands: some are social and cultural markers of season or custom such as local festivals like the Highland Games in which traditional sports took centre stage; others represent physical spectacle arranged for other purposes - principally that of betting, for example horse racing, pugilism (bare-knuckle fighting) and ‘pedestrianism’ (running or walking races).

Early materials held in the collections reflect the intense interest in betting and spectacle for all classes in the 18th and 19th centuries. Feats of endurance staged for wagers, such as the thirty-five round bout between the boxers Tom Crib and Tom Molineaux (in 1810) were a regular occurrence, and the most dramatic of these events became a part of folk history, constantly referred to. Pierce Egan, one of the earliest of sports correspondents, in his account of pugilism and its practitioners Boxiana (1812), describes one of the matches between these two men, blow for blow. Also notable among such celebrated events were the more individual and idiosyncratic exploits, such as the attempt of the celebrated pedestrian Captain Barclay to walk 1000 miles in 1000 hours in July 1809 - as described by Walter Thom (1813). Captain Barclay’s deeds and his prescriptions for athletic success were often invoked by writers of the period.

The opportunity to cast wagers imposed its own imperatives on early forms of public sporting spectacle, with the consequence that freak contests with uncertain outcomes were particularly popular: an amusing example is cited in Pierce Egan’s Anecdotes of the turf… (1827) which depicts the famous ‘hopping match which took place on Clapham Common’
Events

Great Britain can lay claim not only to have originated and then codified many of the sports which are popular in the world today, but also to pioneering modern sporting competitions. There are even some ‘Olympic’ precursors. The 16th century ‘Olympick’ games in the Cotswolds organised by Robert Dover are an early example, but it is William Penny Brookes’ 19th century Much Wenlock Olympian Games (described on this website by one of our contributors) which holds particular claims to being a forerunner of the modern Olympics, and which directly inspired Pierre de Coubertin. The British Library holds a number of materials about the Olympic Games ancient and modern, including most of the official reports of the modern Games and the London Games in particular. The foremost commentator on these early Olympic competitions was Theodore Andrea Cook whose *The cruise of the Brangwen* (1908) describes the intercalated Games of 1906. A work of his published in the same year takes the reader back to the Olympics revival of 1896 and forward to the organisation of the 1908 London Games. Another particularly interesting item - described in *An athletics compendium* (2001) as “required reading for the sports historian” - is *The Olympic Games and the Duke of Westminster’s appeal* (1913), which gives an account of the controversies surrounding a Games which never took place: the 1916 Berlin Olympics. A stamp printed for these Games is held in the British Library’s Philatelic Collections.

The 1948 London Games naturally had a much higher profile, and this is reflected in the number of contemporary publications published. There are guides and programmes, special editions of magazines and newspapers, as well as the official report itself.

Early materials

Some curiosities of a sporting kind in the Library’s collections very early, the most notable being *De arte natandi* (1595) which is one of the first manuals on swimming ever to be written. Karen Limper-Herz, one of the British Library’s curators of printed historical sources says of it:
‘When A Short introduction for to learne to Swimme was published in London in 1595, it was not only the first book on the subject of swimming to be published in English but also the first printed guide to any form of sport published in the English language. The book is Christopher Middleton’s (d. 1628) translation of Everard Digby’s (c. 1551-1605) Latin text De arte natandi which had been published in London in 1587. Middleton translated Digby’s text to bring a simplified and shortened version of the practical guide to a non-learned audience.

Both the English and the Latin editions are written in dialogue form and are decorated with woodcuts. The ingeniously designed woodcut border designs show, for example, a river flanked by trees, a herd of cows by the river, a man sitting on the bank of the river removing his stockings, or a naked man ready to dive into the river. The woodcut borders are repeatedly used throughout the book, but each of them is decorated with a different rectangular woodcut at the centre. The centre illustrations show new strokes or tricks to be performed in the water, such as “To turn in the water like a roach”, “To hang by the chin in the water”, “To pare his toes in the water”, or “To carry anything dry over the water in his hands”.

Some of the woodcuts in the British Library copy have been coloured by hand. In addition, the margins contain contemporary comments such as “is not ye water old”, “I can not get on my hoses”, or “you will caper downward if you take not heed”. Whether the book was ever used by someone to learn to swim is unfortunately unknown, but it certainly gives us a vivid insight into how its readers engaged with the subject’.

Coaching manuals

Sporting manuals are well represented in the collections even from the earliest days, and these found a wider audience than might be expected, since certain sports had a cultural as well as a physical significance. Pugilism in particular had its aristocratic adherents, and not only from the betting point of view – Lord Byron was one of many men who paid to train at establishments run by fighters such as Daniel Mendoza, who went on to publish a manual for aspiring pugilists called The art of boxing (1789). Mendoza laid claims to his boxing method as both an art and a science, replacing as it did the old style of rooted-to-the-ground slogging matches with a new emphasis on balance, feints, hooks and cuts on the move, as well as tactical advances and retreats. Mendoza was a popular teacher and had an eye to the usefulness of his methods for those “who might want to practise the art from “sportiveness” rather than from a desire to earn money fighting. “Being productive of health and spirits”, exercise of this kind was
Manuals of exercise for the professional athlete and layman appear quite early on in our period. There are several famous ones, among them Sir John Sinclair's 'Collection of papers on the subject of athletic exercises' (1806) in which the author investigates the training of 'pugilists, wrestlers, runners and jockies' with the aim of discovering how this could have a more general application to the improvement of the health of the population at large. Sir John's conclusions as to the undoubted benefits of training regimes for ordinary people should not surprise us, as many commentators in the latter part of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and early part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century were inspired to do the same, including 'Peter Parley' (1840) and Donald Walker (1834). Others had a slightly different axe to grind. The writer of The Art of manual defence (1789) wanted to appeal specifically to the gentleman wanting to protect himself from “the insolence so peculiar to the manners of the lower order of people in this country.”

Somewhat later on in our period, we find less rigorous forms of exercise also being proposed for women, as evidenced by De Wahl's Practical hints on… physical training… for girls 8305a11 (1847) and Bureaud-Riofrey's Physical education for… young ladies 7581bb21 (circa 1838).

Each commentator had his favoured tips to improve performance, some of them unfamiliar to us, some rather dubious. The writer of the Art of manual defence had special advice for professional practitioners of the pugilistic art, with hints for preparing for a scheduled fight which included taking “a pint of best red wine mulled, with a tablesponful of brandy” on the morning itself. Walter Thom’s advice to runners included the advocacy of Captain Barclay's training regime: i.e., regular doses of Glauber salts, 20-24 miles per day of walking and running, and sweating regimes such as “running four miles in flannel at the top of his speed…drinking hot liquor”, then going to bed in his flannels “covered with six or eight pairs of blankets”.

As late as 1913 Sam Mussabini, the celebrated coach of Harold Abrahams, was recommending his own recipe for purging in the form of. “Epsom salts brewed up with liquorice, gentian root, camomile and ginger”.

The post Second World War period saw the appearance of coaching manuals based very firmly on scientifically researched training. The Amateur Athletic Association produced a number of these, on all aspects of track and field sports, and these were matched by publications from the United States, a country which had been a proponent of scientific coaching from the very earliest years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The number of books for both amateurs and professionals rapidly increased and show no sign of diminishing as new discoveries are made in the sciences of human physiology, biomechanics and nutrition.

Sports participation

The opportunity to lay wagers fuelled a boom in running in the early part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and by the 1850s, running tracks (cinder paths) where races were run by professional runners, could often be found attached to public houses. Running for health or enjoyment - notwithstanding the philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s practice of jogging in St James Park for an hour every day when in London\footnote{As described by the Bentham Project at UCL https://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/journal/cfford.htm} - was probably looked at askance by the lay person early on in our period but it is surprising how aware the commentators themselves are of the usefulness of exercise for the health and spirits. McNab, Lovesey and Huxtable in their admirable bibliography of athletics books draw attention to one of the very earliest: Sir Thomas Elyot's The boke named the Governour written in 1531, in which the author maintains that 'rennying is bothe a good exercise and a laudable solace' and it is obvious that the benefits of physical exercise were fully understood from the ancient period onwards. Naturally, folk games right up until the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century, were enjoyed mainly for the fun and social opportunities they provided. There were many of these casual amusements, the basic rules and practice of which had been handed down over generations: throwing sports such as quoits were particularly popular and could be played by all ages and sexes, while the continuing existence and

\footnote{Karen Downing 'The gentleman boxer: boxing, manners and masculinity in 18\textsuperscript{th} C England' in Men and masculinities May 2008 1-25}
popularity of bowling and bowling clubs testifies both to the efficiency of their organisation and their institutionalisation within communities. They have several historians such as Edward Linney and James Manson.

Football has a similarly long history, being popular enough – as we have seen - to be prescribed by Edward II in the 14th century, and described in several early topographical accounts such as Richard Carew's Survey of Cornwall.

Amateurism

What we now characterise as the ‘cult’ of amateurism becomes observable in the second half of the 19th century, and has its roots in the sporting traditions of patriarchal institutions like military colleges, universities and public schools who put a premium on sport as a motivator and exemplar of the virtues of ethical behaviour and courage. The rise of the middle classes and their identification with the sporting ethos of these elite institutions helped to spread such ideas. In 1864 the Clarendon Commission had commended the public schools for their ‘love of healthy sports and exercise’ and the ideas about ‘fair play’ which underlay them. The number of school playing fields consequently increased, and participation in sport for its health giving properties and inculcation of sportsmanship became encouraged. Notwithstanding this ‘institutionalisation’ process there remains a long tradition of self governing and self-supporting regional sporting activity in the United Kingdom which stands outside this ethos. Competitive athletic events in areas like the Lake District and the Highlands were open to local working men, with monetary inducements on offer in many cases, and these sports competitions continued, but they increasingly came up against the prohibitions of the new amateur associations who took it upon themselves to regulate and to codify sports, and to remove monetary inducements. Such developments caused schisms which remained for many years. Fell running was one of the sports which remained outside the ‘establishment’ though it continued to be important in the local culture, as one early account makes clear. (Machell 1911). Commentators emphasise its current success, as endurance sports gain increasing popularity in Britain.

1886 saw the first English athletics championship organised by the Amateur Athletic Association. This was strictly open to amateurs only, described by the AAA as ‘any person who has never competed for money with or against a professional for any prize, and who has never taught., pursued or assisted in the practice of athletic exercises as a means of obtaining a livelihood’. Some commentators around this time viewed the professional sportsperson with suspicion. Henry F Wilkinson writing in 1875 carefully traces the growth of what he calls ‘amateur branch athletics’ attributing its earliest manifestations to public schools, universities and military colleges, He is encouraging on the question of the usefulness of sports training for the ‘gentleman’, suggesting that his ‘liberal diet’ will have given him a sound foundation upon which to build, unlike the professional who has a seedier background, and has been “probably...leading a loafing, public house kind of life for some time past”. F A M Webster – a very prolific writer on sport for both men and women, – had a more modern approach: while noting that there were two classes of amateur: “the gentleman amateurs and the amateurs who had formed themselves into tradesmen clubs” (1919), his view was that scientific coaching was essential if talented British amateurs were to be matched in competition with their foreign contemporaries. Great Britain had to wait until the second half of the 20th century for a system of coaching qualifications to be finally established. However, it is clear from the literature that coaching of one kind or another was an accepted part of competitive sport long before this. One of its prime exponents was the sprinter Harold Abrahams, who is portrayed in the Oscar-winning film Chariots of Fire as battling to enlist professional help with his Olympic preparations. Later, he became a respected commentator on British sport, wrote several books on training and edited a number of official Olympic reports.

As part of this institutionalisation process, the latter half of the 19th century saw the beginnings of competitive leagues in a number of sports, the Football League being set up in 1888 in the same year as the Lawn Tennis Association was formed. The 1880s were very much a decade of codification of rules and regulations for sporting competition, many of which remain unchanged today. Yet a certain class divide remained – which was also to some extent a north-south divide - with the cricket ‘Lancashire League’ and the Rugby League having a discernable second class status in the social scheme of things.

The working classes enjoyed, as spectators and to a lesser extent as players, their football and their rugby league, while traditional leisure pastimes like fishing, bowls, skittles, quoits, darts, billiards, pigeon and dog racing continued to play important roles in their lives. Inevitably a degree of paternalism is evident in the fostering of working class
Sports – in the provision of clubs, public baths, and parks. By 1890 there were 203 football clubs in Liverpool with their own local leagues.

Leisure publications & biographies

The development of a ‘leisure’ press in the latter part of the 19th century was perfectly timed to answer the needs of the growing ranks of both amateur and professional sports people. Numerous athletics, cycling, tennis and golf magazines appeared around this time, catering for enthusiasts of both sexes, and as the collections at the Newspaper Library in Colindale show, though some publications were short lived, the British obsession with reading about sport in weekly and fortnightly publications – and on the back pages of newspapers – grew steadily. Some examples of early titles are: Bicycling news (1876-1939), The British Olympic Association’s World sports (1936-1972) and Athletics weekly (1950-). As Martin Polley has shown in his edited compilation of sports writing from 1880 to 1914 sports writing also appears in journals such as Blackwood’s Edinburgh magazine and The Contemporary review.

To add to these printed materials the Library now collects electronic ones like fanzines, as well as audio histories like the Sound Archive’s ‘Oral history of athletics’. Such materials augment the huge collection of sporting biographies and autobiographies, which increasingly support social scientific research into sport.

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