

# Sport and social class



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Today sport is seen as a symbol of unity for the young people, something you can do no matter what is your skin color or your social status. In the past the difference between social classes was notable, and often people were not allowed to train or participate in games because of their social status.

In his book "The Ancient Olympic Games", Judith Swaddling shows us the first social differences in sport. In those Olympics almost everyone was allowed to participate except the slaves, who were counted as items back then and giving any kind of freedom to these people was something unheard of. The big difference between classes back then was shown in the horse racing. In this sport you could participate only with your own horse, and since the one race was long at least 6 tracks the only people who could afford such training, and also to feed both the horse and rider. Also the Olive wreath was not awarded to the jockey, but to the horse owner which discriminated all of the jockey effort. There were also chariot races where chariot were pulled by two or four horses, there the principle remain the same and the horse owners gained all the fame, instead of the hard working jockeys.

In the Middle Ages the difference between the rich and poor in the sport continued to grow. The Olympics of that time - The Knight Tournaments were allowed only for aristocrats and royals and the poor were not allowed even as spectators. The poor people were left to be in a league of their own. During this period for the rich people the Bowls became one of the biggest sports in the country only because they loved to gamble on it. Also Colf (the today`s Golf) was very popular among the nobles . The peasants mainly trained with the sole purpose to be prepared for war, and this is the biggest

reason why sword fighting and archery were so popular back then.

( Medieval Sports (2012). [www. middle-ages. org. uk](http://www.middle-ages.org.uk))

During the Georgian era the class difference decreased. The main sport played back then was cricket and both rich and poor played it. The main changing factor was gambling to cricket which was something very popular for the rich. Often they hired people from the lower classes to play for their teams in exchange for money. Many of the lower class cricket players were offered work in the Lords mansions. A lot of the richer players were against this, mainly because they believed sport must remain clean, without any financial stimulation to the players. Of course the rich could afford to play and spend the time, but for the poor who needed to work extra hard to get their food this was unbelievable. This is the period when the first disputes between amateurs and professionals came up.

In a popular article Sandiford (1983) shows us the difference between the social classes during the Victorian era is increased again. The amateurs (upper-class) were distancing themselves from the lower class professionals. Class distinctions were so big that both sides used different dressing rooms, used different trains to travel and etc. E. J. " Tiger" Smith of Warwickshire wrote- " Even the stands were built with the idea of separating the elite from the multie. There were members pavilions, balconies, grandstands, and open areas-each denoting, trough price and usage, a certain social status." (Sandiford 1983, page 33).

The amateurs officially claimed that they do everything because they want to keep the sport clean but, many historians doubt this and claim they don't

want their games to attract attention from the lower classes and to be played for fun just between them. Even many clubs organized cricket games between the amateurs and the professionals the difference in the social class stayed many years ahead. The upper and lower class often hated each other and the games where the lower class won were remembered as remarkable. Many people nowadays claim that cricket is so unique game because of the amateurs and the fact that in so many years no one was remembered but the game was still the number 1 sport in the country. Many amateurs actually made money from cricket, by going to different countries on tours and making huge profit from it, but since it was unofficial payment nobody protested. Even until 1952 the difference between crickets remained as the journalist from the Financial Times, Rob Hastings wrote: " When Len Hutton led the England team out to field against India at Headingley in the summer of 1952, so becoming the country's first professional captain, he was quietly cocking a snook at the cricketing establishment. Cricketers in England had, for as long as anyone could remember, being divided by social hierarchy. There were " the Gentlemen"; and then there were " the Players". For the Players, cricket was a living. They were from the working classes and were paid fees to play for their counties and their country. The Gentlemen, on the other hand, were from aristocratic backgrounds and were sufficiently well off to play for the love of the game alone."

In his book " Rugby's Great Split" Tony Collins presents to us one of the biggest social battles in sport. In 1890 the working class clubs from North were in a big conflict with the southern clubs of gentlemen, (the upper class) because they could not turn professionals, and after furious disputes and

refuse to step back from both sides. For a long time the working class people in the North liked to play the hacking game of rugby than any other. This sport was among the most popular ones in the north of England and most of the players were workers in the mines or the factories. The dream to play the game they love and get paid for doing this was so close to them, but the rich amateurs from the south were strictly against this and the Rugby Union federation which was located in the south did not let them to accept payments. The rugby players and official from the north decided to start their own league, which will be fully professional and players can be payed for playing their favorite game. The rivalry between the working class north and the upper class south increased after this decision. After the new found Rugby League was found mainly from teams from the North many amateurs came there to play for money, and also many northern clubs players and administration workers quit because they still believed in amateurism. This made the Rugby Union league even weaker causing a big problem for the Rugby Union, taking them 18 years to win another international championship.