

THE OVER-PRODUCTION OF US SPORTS AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF CULTURAL LABOR

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Abstract This article focuses on how US professional sports utilize the New International Division of Cultural Labor to supplement an overly costly local labor pool and over-supplied local market. We argue that while the classic problem of over-production is slowly eroding the sealed-off nature of US culture, the forces of its hyper-protectionist capitalism continue to characterize sports, precluding equal exchange.

Key words • globalization • New International Division of Cultural Labor • sport • United States

Under the Taliban, which supposedly withdrew from the world of states, Afghanistan affiliated with one of the most venerable and successful institutions of global civil society. Not long before the United States began military action there in 2001, the country became the 74th member of the International Cricket Council (ICC). The Taliban's decision to affiliate had been inspired by connections to Pakistan, where cricket is very popular. Those ties had been developed, with CIA encouragement of course, during the previous two decades, following the Soviet invasion — which the US Government had furtively encouraged in order to generate a Vietnam equivalent to undermine the USSR. Today, the headquarters of the Afghanistan Cricket Federation remain in Kabul, aided by Pakistan Cricket Board money and ICC encouragement, and there are reported to be 900 Afghan cricketers (Williams, 2001).

This anecdote references two things. First, it illustrates the relative autonomy of sport from politics. How else could a regime known to abjure links to colonial, neo-colonial, capitalist, and secular pastimes — rejecting even basic diplomacy — endorse a powerful (and western-dominated) institution? Second, it illustrates that this relative autonomy is underpinned by, precisely, politics; for this cricket-

ing link derived from cold-war surrogacy and postcolonial hangovers. The anecdote's lesson is clear: that the globalization of sport is equally about the appeal of sport and its imbrication with world capitalism.

The Taliban's decision to affiliate with the ICC illustrates the complex and contradictory links among sport, politics, and global capitalism in a country that is on the economic and political periphery. We can discern similar intricacies and tensions at one of the epicenters of global capitalism, the USA. It is highly paradoxical that while US sport has been used as a quintessential signifier of *laissez-faire* values, both inside and outside the country, it is heavily protected, operating in an economically uncompetitive, welfarist environment. We investigate this important but understudied contradiction of protectionism via the global traffic in both workers and audiences associated with US professional sport. This echoes the approach we have recently used to analyze the uneven but interconnected processes that characterize the present moment in sport, via a New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL) that governs globalization, television, and commodification (Miller et al., 2001a). The most significant development since the publication of that work has been the bust following the boom in TV sports, notably in the US, Germany, and Britain. Despite the comforting canard that sports broadcasting is an economic goldmine, audiences for many major sports have been in decline in many parts of the world year after year, while the new interactive technologies have not provided substitute income at the rate anticipated (Church, 2003).

In this article, we explicate this trend via the dynamics of the NICL, concentrating on the processes by which US professional sports utilize a global labor pool and audiences to supplement an over-supplied local market. We conclude that while the classic problem of over-production is slowly eroding the sealed-off nature of US culture, the forces of hyper-protectionist capitalism continue to preclude equal exchange.

The NICL derives from a reconceptualization of economic dependency theory that followed the inflationary chaos of the 1970s. Since that time, First World growth has been premised upon the penetration of peasant, and more recently former state-socialist, nations in a manner that reconstitutes economic, social, and cultural arrangements to favor transnational capital (Hoogvelt, 2001). Developing markets for labor and products, and the shift from the spatial *sensitivities* of electrics to the spatial *insensitivities* of electronics, have pushed First World businesses beyond treating Third World countries as suppliers of raw materials, to look on them as shadow-setters of the price of work, competing among themselves and with the First and Second Worlds for employment. This development broke up the prior division of the world into a small number of industrialized nations and a majority of underdeveloped ones, as production was split across continents. Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, and Otto Kreye (1980) christened it the New International Division of Labor.

The idea behind the NICL is that, just as manufacturing fled the First World, cultural production has also relocated. At the level of popular and high-culture texts, computer-aided design and manufacture, sales, marketing, and information, labor-market expansion and developments in global transportation and communications technology have diminished the need for the colocation of management,

labor, and consumption (Baldoz et al., 2001; Freeman, 2000). The NICL has been most dramatically applied to film and television production (Miller et al., 2001b). In sport, John Bale and Joseph Maguire (1994) highlight the growing Afro-Caribbean involvement in British football¹ and the presence in the US of track and pool athletes from many nations, stimulated largely by college scholarship programs. They report the summer appearance of cricketers from the Commonwealth of Nations to play in England's domestic competition, and comment on the cosmopolitan lifestyles of elite golf, tennis, rugby union, and rugby league players.

Football is the major site of labor mobility. Footballers move in accordance with several factor endowments, beyond issues such as talent and money. There is a clear link between imperial history and job destination in the case of Latin Americans going to Spain, Portugal, and Italy, or Africans playing in France, while cultural ties draw Scandinavians to Britain (Giulianotti, 2002). A small labor aristocracy experiences genuine class mobility in financial terms, underpinned by a huge reserve army of labor and ancillary workers that is subject to massive exploitation.

The NICL also generates new processes of knowledge transfer. Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) see reflexive accumulation (the production of knowledge) combining with flexible specialization in the workplace to challenge orthodox notions of space and time.² Global flows of ideas, people, and capital render location an increasingly less important determinant of identity. While it is highly unlikely that globalization will produce a single global culture, global processes nevertheless foster the conditions for increased interaction of people who live apart but share sociopolitical and economic interests. Globally mobile citizens emerge within information flows, and they in turn influence the recipients of information. By rendering problematic both space and time, globalization confuses identity — one effect of which is to question the meaning and efficacy of nationalism. Multicultural national sporting teams (e.g. England being represented by cricketers of Zimbabwean, South African, Caribbean, New Zealand, Indian, Peruvian, Italian, and Australian birth or upbringing) blur the meaning of 'us' versus 'them', the traditional political and racial core of nationalist sentiment.

As a consequence, the NICL opens up new domestic fronts in a struggle over identification. This relates to the commodification that characterizes sport. From the very beginnings of codified sport in the late 19th century, marketing has been central. For example, the growth spurt of football in Britain in the 1890s and 1900s was closely connected to sponsorship from breweries. Only a century ago, Manchester United went into liquidation until it was bought and renamed by Manchester Breweries (Collins and Vamplew, 2002: 46–7). So in no sense would we argue for a halcyon period when business and sport were separate spheres of civil society. The key is that the rise of electronic media coverage, intertwined with new forms of market-driven administration, has conditioned the relative autonomy of sport from the media, government, and commerce. A turning point came with the emergence in the 1970s of global cricket contests that transcended nationally selected teams. In 1970, when South Africa was exiled from the world game because of racism, Guinness sponsored a substitute tour of England by a global team (including white South Africans) (Collins and Vamplew, 2002: 60)

and a few years later there was a television takeover of world cricket from traditional authorities. The first of these phenomena referenced the prospect of transnational organization, commerce, and identification, and the second referenced the support given to cricket over many years by public broadcasters across much of the former British Empire, which came to excite the profit drives of less generous and inventive commercial interests. In other words, once public broadcasters had created a viewing public, brokering the risk on public money, capital moved in to pick up a market that it had not shown the skill to tap or generate (Miller, 1989). Similar stories could be told of basketball in the US, which was stimulated by coverage from public TV in San Francisco.

Since the growth of sponsorship income and commercial control of sports that we traced in *Globalization and Sport*, a newly vigorous process of product placement has emerged. Not content with 30-second TV spots or arena signage, Adidas redesigned its football boot for the 2002 World Cup to achieve 'maximum on-field visibility'. Regardless of the TV angle or the use of slow-motion replay, the company's three-stripe logo would be visible every time one of the 150 players in the tournament who were paid to wear the 'Predator Mania' shoe was in-shot. Major stars were encouraged to don a champagne-colored variety, which had been tested for maximum televisual impact (Kahn, 2002). Similarly, brewers take advantage of ball-by-ball TV coverage of world cricket by claiming naming rights — the Foster's Oval and Bass Headingley in England — and do the same with British football. Sales increases in the aftermath of these moves have been exponential, and the results have been similar for Anheuser-Busch in the US (Collins and Vamplew, 2002: 60–1, 63–4). In short, the NICL produces new publics in its restless search for spectators whose viewing and supporting labor will persuade the media to cover sports and sell the presence of these publics to advertisers. We shall serially address these worker and audience trends.

The NICL and Workers

At the top of certain sports, rates of pay for workers who compete internationally have combined with a deregulated world TV market to create labor cosmopolitans across football, ice hockey, swimming, basketball, track, cycling, golf, tennis, and cricket. They migrate on a seasonal or permanent basis, as per other new professional diasporas (Cohen, 1997: 155–76). Secondary labor markets overseas also provide a place to test home-grown players — more than 130 National Football League (NFL) footballers in 1998 had played in League-sponsored competitions outside the US. In terms of foreign-born NFL players, Canada has always been the largest supplier, but the 1999–2000 season featured 50 overseas players from 23 countries. By 2002, 64 overseas-born players had appeared, from 28 countries (NFL International, 2002). Of course, some of these players were born of US parents living abroad as part of the work of empire (e.g. soldiers quartered overseas — at the time of writing the US military has a major presence on four continents) or were the children of economic migrants, rather than direct recruits to the NFL. But that does not discount their place within an international division of labor, albeit as a side effect of imperialism.

Foreign recruiting by US sports is partially designed to circumvent the historic gains made by local athletes to secure income redistribution. Between 1974 and 1991, the proportion of revenue spent on Major League Baseball (MLB) players' salaries increased from 17.6 to 42.9 percent. The free agency achieved by baseballers following court and union action produced wealthy clubs that could buy great players and poor clubs that could not. So in 1999, the New York Yankees' payroll was US\$85 million, whereas the Montréal Expos paid out just US\$16 million. The two sides performed as those figures would suggest (Marcano and Fidler, 1999: 517–18).

MLB teams set up baseball academies across Latin America in the 1980s. The biggest source for the pros today is the Dominican Republic, with Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Mexico of increasing importance. In the 2002 season, 89 Dominicans had Major-League contracts, and 1561 were playing in the Minors. That accounts for almost 25 percent of all pro-ballplayers in the US. The academies search for young men (defined as 11 or older) who will sign up for much less than equivalently gifted players domiciled in the US. Some US-based *hispano hablantes* also drop out of high school to join the Dominican amateur leagues, in the hope of being noticed by MLB representatives (Brown, 2002). Academy members are outside the US amateur draft's protection of wages and conditions — sporting corporations are uninterested in applying labor laws and conditions from where their executives live. Teams discourage young boys from attending school, and require them to avoid agents (whose bargaining skills have been so important in the domestic arena). MLB teams have 30 baseball academies in the Republic, and the sport ranks among the top five national industries. Life in the academies is brutish and short, and there are many tragic stories of players destined for the equivalent of a wrecking yard if injuries or skill levels militate against their success. Rejected in their early 20s, they have totally unmarketable skills (Guevara et al., 2002).

It is especially significant that these programs are aimed at Third World states. The First World receives an entirely different type of aid, based on developing audiences for baseball rather than schooling stars (Japan, not the Dominican Republic, was the first place outside North America³ to host an official MLB series, in April 2000). When US-based players have sought to play off-season back home in Latin America, MLB has often blocked them, lest there develop an alternative baseball system. There was great irony and symbolic violence in baseball's nomination of March 2000 and 2001 as 'The Month of the Americas', in recognition of Hispanic contributions to the sport — *Sports Illustrated* offered a photo-essay of young boys in the Dominican Republic using makeshift equipment in the dirt, overlooked by satellite dishes bringing coverage of US games (Chass, 1998a, 1998b; Winegardner, 1999; Marcano and Fidler, 1999: 512, 518; 'MLB Honors', 1999; *Sports Illustrated*, 2000).

Officially bi-national leagues, where teams themselves come from outside the US, must comply with multiple legal systems. North American pro leagues in baseball, basketball, and hockey are all subject to Canadian as well as US legislation on labor (Jarvis and Coleman, 1999: 347). This has not been a problem in practice for baseball in its dealings with Latin America — no surprise, for the Monroe Doctrine that has animated US policy on the region as its backyard

lives on in licensing dismissive attitudes towards the legal frameworks of others. Effectively the Third World is combed for cheap labor and the First World for affluent consumers, who provide MLB with over US\$100 million in annual revenue from merchandising, amounting to 20 percent of licensing sales (Fisher, 2003).

It is clear that the classic capitalist problem of over-production has forced US professional sports to transcend the provincialism of US TV and arenas. Having exhausted the domestic supply of good, cheap, obedient athletes and wealthy consumers, the National Basketball Association (NBA) went overseas during the 1990s in search of cheap talent and likely customers, opening offices in Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Hong Kong, and Mexico. Just three international players were drafted into the NBA for the 1993–4 season. The number had increased to 12 four years on. Opening rosters for the 1999–2000 season contained 37 international players from 25 countries, compared to 29 players from 20 nations two years earlier. The 2002–3 season featured 65 players from 34 countries, which included Argentina, Belize, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Spain, and Venezuela as well as a longer standing presence from Serbia/Montenegro and Germany. In 1993, 6 percent of the roster was foreign; in 2003, the figure was 16 percent (Eisenberg, 2003; ‘Global Player List Grows’, 1999; Jackson and Andrews, 1999: 34; NBA, 2002, 2003; Whitnell, 1999). In 2002, the number one draft pick was Yao Ming from the People’s Republic of China (Steele, 2002; Price, 2002b), and 29 percent of NBA draftees came from outside the US (Coffey, 2002). Most lists of the 20-best players in the NBA now nominate a Yugoslavian (Peja Stojakovic), a Virgin Islander (Tim Duncan), a German (Dirk Nowitzki), and a Canadian (Steve Nash), while the best of the young include representatives from France (Tony Parker), Spain (Pau Gasol, who won Rookie of the Year in 2002), Russia (Andrei Kirilenko), and Turkey (Hedo Turkoglu) (Eisenberg, 2003; Wilbon, 2002). In 2001, the National Hockey League scoring champion was Jarome Iginla, who is of Nigerian descent, and Ichiro Suzuki from Japan was the Most Valuable Player in American League baseball. He is said to bring in US\$30 million each year to baseball from Japanese companies in addition to exciting new domestic audiences through his stylistic differences from other players (Fisher, 2003; Minnesota Public Radio, 2002).

Of course, the corollary of these developments is the disintegration of certain chauvinistic US shibboleths, notably that ‘white men can’t jump’ (a position that was always already implausible, given the history of the high-jump and pole-vault). The supremacist assertion that the US ‘owned’ basketball looked increasingly anachronistic. It finally tumbled to the floor in September 2002, when the US national team was defeated on successive nights in the World Basketball Championship by Argentina, Yugoslavia, and Spain — on a US court. Now the US must qualify for inclusion in the 2004 Olympics. Used only to their own, domestic rules, the hitherto protected US players were unable to adjust to alternative, globally endorsed norms (Yu, 2003).

For its part, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) *began* with use of the NICL, rather than turning to it once the domestic market in players and fans had become super-saturated in terms of quality and quantity respectively. The NICL was a means of immediately moving to a high standard

of player ability and global spectator appeal. Twenty-three nations were represented by 46 players in the 2002 season, with 25 percent of WNBA pros born outside the US. The most powerful countries were Brazil and Australia. Five All-Stars were foreign nationals, from Australia (Lauren Jackson and Penny Taylor), Portugal (Ticha Penicheiro), Canada (Stacey Dales-Schuman), and Congo (Mwadi Mabika) (Orton, 2002). Whiteness? Blackness? For once, US discourses of racialization were shown to be intensely local. And the same thing was happening to audiences.

The NICL and Audiences

The NICL is partly formed through the increased significance of the media in funding and disseminating sport. Emergent media forms have long harnessed themselves to strong, immediate senses of 'being there' at sporting events of great moment — in the 1930s, by simulating actuality radio commentary on cricket matches in England for Australian audiences, and in the 1970s, through vivid satellite coverage of global mega sports events (Real, 1989, 1996). In the late 1990s, a CBS internet affiliate provided US cricket fans with ball-by-ball information on matches around the world (*Business Wire*, 1999), one-day internationals involving South Asian teams were available on pay-per-view television, and DirecTV offered the 2003 World Cup to subscribers via satellite.

Football players and other athletes are effectively vended by sports organizations to television broadcasters and advertisers. They may soon be more directly employed as TV talent, by sports that will control the electronic distribution and display of competitions (this is the background to a dispute between the New York Yankees and Cablevision, a key cable operator). Many people in New York City missed most Yankee games in 2002 because the club declined to sell TV rights to the majority of its matches, preferring to attract advertising to its own network, YES. Cablevision retaliated by refusing to carry YES on its system. A compromise was worked out for the following season (Singer, 2003). This kind of vertical integration was pioneered by sports management companies like the International Marketing Group, which represents players and stages, promotes, markets, televises, and secures advertising and sponsorship for sporting events (Barnett, 1990: 188; Rowe, 1995: 112). Given the cross-border capacity of satellite television and the internet, we expect to see more sporting competitions shaped by technological and commercial reach, rather than by the boundaries of sovereign states and their contained audiences (Gruneau and Whitson, 2001).

Of course, the advent of the NICL has not brought an end to national identification with sports teams and individuals. Fans dispersed across the world shift their sports spectatorship between places of origin and domicile. The sporting gaze may be both attracted to immediate spectacle and drawn to distant, deeply affective contests. In Ireland, Sky and CNN broadcast foreign sports like soccer and basketball from outside the country, while Setanta Sport, Tara TV, and air-plane programming send sports images in the other direction to the Irish diaspora (Cronin, 1999: 68). Since 1994, 14 MLB teams have offered domestic Spanish-language broadcasts. So New York City-based Dominicans frequently meet at a

bar that provides simultaneous coverage of games involving the two most prominent Major League batters from the Republic, Sammy Sosa and Manny Ramirez, whose team affiliations are subordinated to their Dominican heritage. Expatriate English football fans pay per view for 'home-team' games and gossip about players' form and managers' (in)competence in cyber chatrooms. Bulgarian audiences watch their compatriote Polina Tzekova, the Houston Comets' number-one draft pick, in the WNBA. The German media provided intensive coverage of the 1999 NBA game between Seattle and Dallas, which featured Detlef Schrempf and Nowitzki, and the NBA has begun Spanish-language coverage and Chinese-language websites (Cooper, 1999; Dempsey, 1999; Marcano and Fidler, 1999; NBA, 2003; Whitnell, 1999). Sports spectatorship, by means of the established and new media, is now more than ever decoupled from restrictions of space and time.

National originary identification is not limited to fan diasporas. Take the famous 1998 contest between the Euro-American Mark McGwire and the Latino Sosa (who as a child had sold fruit and shone shoes on the streets of San Pedro de Macoris) to eclipse Roger Maris's single-season baseball home-run record. Their rivalry was consistently coded as a contest between a lost US homogeneity and a segmented nation, *post-e pluribus unum*, where the 'national pastime' was becoming, indeed, a thing of the past (Juffer, 2002; also see Sobchak, 1997). Alan Bairner (2001) notes that:

Afterward McGwire observed, 'I'm glad I've been associated with Sammy Sosa. It's been a great year for everyone. I'm absolutely exhausted. I don't think you can use your mind any more playing baseball. I've amazed myself that I've stayed in a tunnel for so long. It just proves to me I can overcome anything with the strength of my mind.' . . . Sosa's assessment of the season had been rather more cryptic but no less instructive. Speaking about his own personal achievement, he is on record as saying, 'My country is happy.' . . . He did not mean the United States. (Bairner, 2001: 101)

So foreign players and spectators are of great importance to US sport. The NFL's increasing reliance on a global marketplace is now even amounting to collaborations with rival codes — in 2002, FC Barcelona, the leading Catalan football club, signed a cross-promotional deal with the NFL. American football, a minor sport globally, gained from an association with a truly competitive sport, while Barcelona obtained entrée to the US. The Barcelona deal followed one struck by Manchester United with the Yankees, the only US sporting club with any real meaning across the globe following the decline of the Chicago Bulls (Buckley, 1999; 'NFL Full', 1999; NFL International, 1999; G. Solomon, 2002). This has led to protests from sectors of the US media. A representative reaction is the *Village Voice*'s denunciation of football: 'Every four years the World Cup comes around, and with it a swarm of soccer nerds and bullies reminding us how backward and provincial we are for not appreciating soccer enough' (Barra, 2002).

Of course, other critics, such as Habte Selassie (2002), connect this particular form of protectionism to cold-war scapegoating of immigrants, with the rejection of football in the 1940s and 1950s a rejection of difference, and there is ample evidence of equivalent ethnic marking in Anglo-settler societies elsewhere (Miller et al., 2001a).

Even *Time* magazine's European business correspondent (Ledbetter, 2002) acknowledges the world-historical extent of cultural protectionism in the US, which applies across the entertainment spectrum (Miller et al., 2001b). Many Europeans regard the level of protection in US sport as akin to socialism — *faux* students who have been trained for free in directly and indirectly state-subsidized universities, a draft that seeks to equalize teams artificially, limits on salaries, revenue-sharing, grounds paid for through taxation, exemptions from anti-trust legislation, and limits on cable competition (Ford, 2002). This is a planned, command economy by any other name, one that works efficiently with the recognition that, unlike other industries, sports teams need opponents in order to survive. Competition is an end rather than a means, unlike other forms of capitalism.

The early 21st century clearly shows that the extreme protectionism of the US sports market has run into a domestic over-supply. Networks, cable companies, and municipal governments have begun to question the vast subsidies given to the four major pro sports. The bizarre extent of public financing of facilities has finally been exposed. Expansion teams are under close scrutiny, and Disney immediately looked to sell the 2002 'World' Series winners, the Anaheim Angels, which they had only bought as a means of 'relandscaping and reinvigorating' the location that houses Disneyland and to help pay for the huge debts incurred in purchasing the rights to show sport on ABC and ESPN (Church, 2003; Goldsmith, 2002). Morgan Stanley predicts that the major TV networks will lose US\$1.3 billion on sports between 2002 and 2006. The NFL's fortunes are in decline, with a decrease in TV ratings of 13 percent in the five seasons to 2002. Along the way, the working class pretensions of these sports — especially powerful in the critique of football that it is middle class and hence alien to US sporting sentiment — have been eroded. In the five years from 1997, the proportion of NFL fans earning below US\$30,000 decreased by over 7 percent, while the proportion earning over US\$100,000 went up by 30 percent (Beyers, 2002; Hiestand, 2002; Nunn and Rosentraub, 2003; J. Solomon, 2002).

The obvious move has been to stimulate overseas demand. The NFL subsidizes thousands of hours of television across the globe, invests forlornly in overseas teams via NFL Europe, and offers exhibition games (*Times-Picayune*, 2002). The NBA's Commissioner euphemizes the drastic domestic over-expansion as a sign that '[t]he American sports market is mature', as he unveils plans to draw 50 percent of the league's revenue from overseas (Hiestand, 2002). The NBA is now screened in 205 nations to 750 million homes — though that figure, like all numbers cited for sport on television, should be approached with caution, given the inexactitude of audience measurement in general, and commercial systems in particular. The NBA is seeking both clearer statistics and more direct forms of revenue return through NBA TV, which was available in Greece, Turkey, and Israel in 2002 and is expanding to 10 other countries (Stewart, 2002). It now reports 15 percent of TV revenue and 20 percent of merchandise sales from other nations. There are plans to hold preseason fixtures in Asia, Latin America, and Europe in 2003–4, and for European-based NBA franchises to compete in the US by the end of the decade (Eisenberg, 2003). This movement from provincial protectionism to a NICL that addresses the crisis of domestic over-production is the key to the future of US basketball, with white European stars an added 'advan-

tage' via racialized marketing both internationally and at home. *Time* magazine's 2003 feature on the global impulse (Eisenberg, 2003) stressed the importance of whitening the league, noting that economic analysis finds a strong correlation between a preponderance of black players and a decline in US TV ratings (Kanazawa and Fund, 2001). As the famous anti-racist black coach John Thompson has regretfully said, 'It's only economically smart' (quoted in Coffey, 2002). The NBA has also legalized zone defense in order to diminish the boredom of US players backing opponents into the low post, favoring instead the skilled European jump shooter and hence enabling international rules to operate in a hitherto protected environment where many players are purely defensive and lack shooting skills (Price, 2002a). This has seen the Sacramento Kings and the Dallas Mavericks become the most exciting teams in the league, because their fast-passing game compares so strikingly with the NBA norm of eight virtual on-court spectators to a series of two-man contests (Eisenberg, 2003).

Conclusion

US sport is in a speculative bubble, analogous to the dot-com era's 'irrational exuberance' (Shiller, 2000). In barely a decade, over-bidding for TV rights, fuelled by Rupert Murdoch's dual ambition of creating a global sporting television service while achieving hegemony in its foundational market, has turned broadcast sport from a prized commodity, to a valued loss leader, and finally a contractual liability. As one commentator puts it, 'The US media market is glutted with more sports and entertainment properties than there is ad money to go round' (McCarthy, 2002: 27), during the largest slump in spending on advertising since the Second World War. This has led to an expected US\$3 billion dollar write-down in the value of rights to TV sport paid by US media companies, the collapse of sports rights agencies, and even the demise of AOL-Time Warner's CNN-Sports Illustrated cable channel. Such hard-fought deals as NBC's contract for future Olympic Games are liabilities (Chenoweth and O'Riordan, 2002; Church, 2003). Some firms may go the way of KirchMedia, the German media empire bankrupted by its failure to sell football's 2002 World Cup rights at levels commensurate with the vast cost of purchasing them from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association. When rights are up for renegotiation, television's losses are passed onto sports. Competition for shrinking resources between owners, administrators, coaches, elite players, and other fractions of the sporting industries will not be pretty.

The sporting cartels of the United States are endeavoring, through the NICL, to avoid paying the price of their over-production. Protectionism has consequently eased somewhat in terms of players' origins and the rules of the game, but major barriers remain to truly international exchange. Massive resources are dedicated to importing and exporting players and exporting tastes, but few to importing the latter. To return to our opening anecdote about Afghan cricket, relative autonomy and civil society depend on a shifting complex of politics and economics. The flow of sport between the US and the rest of the world is asymmetrical, exploitative, and likely to remain so.

Notes

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1. We use the word 'football' to describe Association Football. In the US it is called 'soccer'.
2. Some critics argue that this claim to a post-Fordist world is misguided (Hirst and Thompson, 1999).
3. In the field of US sports, 'North America' is used in a way that excludes Mexico, despite geographical, political, economic, treaty, and technical norms.

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