

Chapter 20: Culture and Community in the Global Age: 20-2d Athletics
Book Title: The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History 7th Edition Update, AP® Edition
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20-2d Athletics

Organized baseball leagues arose in America after the Civil War. Football found favor as a college sport around the same time, while basketball originated in 1891 as a YMCA activity. In Britain soccer (football) and rugby leagues formed in the 1880s. All of these sports flourished as spectator activities in the early twentieth century and gave rise to lively press coverage in newspapers. Soccer and rugby, along with the much older sport of cricket, spread readily into Europe's colonies, while baseball found limited favor overseas, primarily in Japan, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.

Internationally, the upsurge in the role of sports and spectating was closely tied to the revival of the Olympic Games. The ancient Greek games had been discontinued in 393 CE. The inspiration to create a modern form came from [**Baron Pierre de Coubertin** \(Founder of the modern Olympic movement, which held its first games in Athens in 1896. \(p. 592\)\)](#) (1863–1937), a French educator who was impressed by the sports played at English private schools like Eton and Rugby. He concluded that “organized sport can create moral and social strength.” Coubertin’s aristocratic vision of purely amateur international competition came to fruition in Athens in 1896 when fourteen countries, all of them European except Australia and Chile, sent athletes to compete in nonteam sports like tennis, fencing, shooting, cycling, and gymnastics. Women were not included, nor did Coubertin’s vision of medals being given for sports-themed art and architecture survive past 1948. The male-only rule was dropped starting with the Paris Olympics of 1900, where women competed in tennis and golf. The role of women increased steadily after that.

Individual excellence was the touchstone of Olympic competition, but nationalistic pride increasingly marked the quadrennial events. The Berlin Olympics of 1936 thus became a showcase for Nazi ideology and spectacle. Sports entertainment since World War II has generally tried to maintain a balance between occasions for national pride, as is apparent in the singing of the national anthem prior to American baseball games, and celebrations of international relations, as seen in soccer World Cups, tennis championships, or the Olympics. Even still, sports have not avoided political controversy, as the black power protests of African American athletes during the Olympic Games in Mexico City showed in 1968. Similarly, American football quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s decision to kneel during the national anthem in 2016, as a quiet protest against police violence toward African Americans, sparked criticism but also support and a worldwide following.

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