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This is the Accepted version of the following publication

Klugman, Matthew (2017) The Passionate, Pathologized Bodies of Sports Fans: How the Digital Turn Might Facilitate a New Cultural History of Modern Spectator Sports. *Journal of Sport History*, 44 (2). 306 - 321. ISSN 0094-1700

The publisher's official version can be found at
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jsporthistory.44.2.0306>
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The Passionate, Pathologized Bodies of Sports Fans – How the Digital Turn Might Facilitate a New Cultural History of Modern Spectator Sports

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ABSTRACT

The passions of spectators have played a vital role in the transformation of games like baseball, Association football, and Australian Rules football into strikingly powerful institutions of popular culture, yet these spectators have largely remained on the margins of sports history. One reason for this has been the difficulty in tracing the various terms and phrases used to describe spectator cultures through the print archive of one sport, let alone comparing this with sports in other countries. This paper explores the way the increasing digitization of newspapers, journals, magazines, and other textual sources allows for the beginning of what might be termed a cultural history 2.0 of sports spectators and sports history more generally. Drawing on three digital archives, it begins the process of tracing the uses and meanings associated with the terms “cranks” and “barrackers” and the phrase “football fever” that were deployed to describe and represent the zealous spectator cultures that emerged around baseball in the United States, Australian Rules football in Australia, and Association football in the United Kingdom in the late 1800s. The digitized sources compared in this paper suggest the bodies of fans, as well as athletes, played a key role in the development of modern spectator sports.

Keywords: fans, spectators, passions, emotions, bodies, digital history, cultural history

[†] The author would like to thank the reviewers of this paper, together with Warwick Anderson, Joy Damousi, Esther Faye, Rob Hess, Fiona Kerr, Fiona McLachlan, Louis Magee, Alex McDermott, Mary McDonald, Gary Osmond, Murray Phillips, Amanda Regan, Jennifer Sterling, Melissa Walsh, and Athas Zafiris for their conversations, advice, and support. I am also very thankful for the research assistance of Athas Zafiris.

This work was supported by the Australian Research Council [ARC DECRA Fellowship DE 130100121].

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INTRODUCTION – MISPLACED PASSIONS?

On Oct 1 1887 the *Boston Globe* reprinted a witty note from the *Chicago Herald* detailing the proclivities of the so-called cranks who followed baseball with notable passion. “The Boston crank” began the piece, “is cold blooded and fiendish”:

He has seen base ball for years and years and yet he cannot hold his tongue. As a rule he wears filmy side-whiskers, a pair of spectacles and a tall hat. During the progress of a game the blood leaves his face and his eyes begin to leak. He stares at the players with a wild look and tugs at his pantaloons with his thin white fingers. But he never sweats. Nobody ever saw a Boston base ball crank wet a hair during the game. He seems to be under the influence of some mesmeric power. He is paralyzed by excitement. If the Harvard yell did not burst from his thin lips at frequent intervals in the game, he would look like a man in a trance.¹

Two years later in 1889 the Melbourne journalist Edward Dyson – writing under the pen name Silas Snell – crafted an evocative meditation on the zealous “barrackers” who attended Australian Rules football matches in Melbourne. “ONE of the most distinctive out-growths of colonial life is the barracker” noted Snell to the readers of the *Melbourne Punch* as if there was something particularly unique about this kind of sports spectator.² “I am not deeply absorbed in football myself” explained Snell, “and I do not mention any prominent, players in my prayers, neither do I take oath by any club in particular, but I admire the barracker —I do homage to his sublime devotion, am amazed at his endurance, and venerate his awful jaw.” Indeed Snell claimed that he rarely missed attending the football, despite the game holding “few attractions for me; I go to enjoy the barracker; I pay to see the barracker shape and hear him scream, and when the weather is fine I take my family, and we stand round and watch him perform.” As Snell saw it, the barracker was calm when the game was at a lull or going smoothly, but his interest intensified as the ball neared the goals, and when the moment of greatest excitement was reached – a contest where the “goal was in danger” – the great yelling would begin; a process that the fascinated Snell described in detail:

A scrimmage right before the posts. Now he [the barracker] feels he's wanted on the job; his country calls him, his face unfolds and his jaws roll back, his eyes alone hang on the brink of that red chasm, he climbs half-way up himself, and hangs in the atmosphere whilst evolving a frenzied howl of mingled rage and pain, spiced with wounded pride and dire apprehension. His view from the front is like a walk into a butcher's shop; he is pregnant with emotion; for a time he is nothing but one gigantic lung and a great gaping aperture, out of which comes hoarse bellows, war whoops, fearful imprecations and inarticulate threats. Presently he begins to subside, the ravine between his features shows a perceptive diminution, his nose rises over the hill, his observations become spasmodic and less incoherent, his forehead creeps into view, his ears step out of his mouth, there's a snap as the lid shuts down, a pint and a-half of tobacco juice is squirted aimlessly into vacancy and the jaw resumes its "demnition" grind; the barracker settles back into his boots, his eyes take on their old critical reserve—the roar of the tempest is stilled, the crisis is past—his duty is done, and the nation's saved.

A further two years later in 1891 the *Nottingham Evening Post* began its report on "Sports and Pastimes" with the observation that "There are times when excitement instead of being a pleasure becomes positive pain."³ "This we should imagine" the report continued, "was the experience of the majority of the Notts. supporters at Trent Bridge on Saturday while the National Cup tie with Stoke was in progress." At issue again were the enthusiasms of sports followers, but in this instance it was the emotions of Association football (soccer) supporters in England who were seen as uniquely passionate:

Probably no section of sportsmen are so enthusiastic as the followers of football. They are devoted to their club as if a man who loved not his club could love nothing. Their loyalty amounts it may be to fanaticism, and, indeed, there is much to be said for a man being a thoroughly earnest supporter of any organisation he chooses. The most ardent Notts, men must have been on the rack for the greater part of last Saturday afternoon, for from, their point of

view, the contest must have been much too close to be pleasant. It was struggle which will long remembered one of the best of the season.

I begin this paper with these three fragments *not* because they represent something fundamentally new or unknown, but rather because of what the conjunction of these fragments point to – namely a critical gap in the historiography of modern spectator sports. Historians of baseball are aware that in the 1880s “crank” became the first popular term in the US to designate those obsessed with baseball, only to later be replaced with the term “fan.”⁴ Likewise historians of Australian Rules football know that in the 1870s the term “barracker” was coined to describe those supporters whose passions were most aroused by the game.⁵ And historians of Association football in the United Kingdom have detailed the way the sport quickly became a site of fervent spectatorship, especially in the north and midlands.⁶ The connection between these three sports is that in the late 1800s all developed spectator cultures that were deemed notable by those at the time for the intensity of the emotions that coalesced around them. Yet the history of the emergence and development of these cultures of emotion is yet to be chronicled.

Instead of delving deeply into these passions, historians of sport have tended to use the new terms and metaphors (such as mania and fever) of spectator culture as akin to photographs and other visual elements – as something that adds interest and flavor to accounts, but not as something pointing to emerging cultures of seemingly excessive behavior deserving of exploration in its own right.⁷ Terms like barracker and phrases like “football mania” have been briefly analyzed for what they reveal of the class dynamics and tensions around spectator culture, but not yet what they point to of the emotions and experiences of these supporters.⁸ The one aspect of fan behavior that has received considerable attention has been that of violence.⁹ Yet even in these studies the focus tends to be on questions of just how civilized spectators were rather than of the way sporting contests came to be imbued with enough meaning to facilitate violence against referees, players and opposing spectators when games were lost. Moreover, a broader question remains unasked and unanswered. That is, how can we understand instances of violence if we do not understand more of the

spectator culture – with all its attendant passions and frustrations – out of which the moments of violence come?

Intense excitement plays a key role in each of the three fragments that I quoted at the beginning of this paper. The Boston crank seems to be mesmerized, “paralyzed by excitement.” When the game is at its most exciting, the colonial barracker unleashes “a frenzied howl of mingled rage and pain, spiced with wounded pride and dire apprehension.” Meanwhile, the fanatical love of the Notts supporters for their team is so great that they experience a torturous pain, rather than pleasure, from the excitement provoked by one of the best football contests of the season. Taken together then, these fragments could be seen as testament to Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning’s notion that modern spectator sports developed as part of a quest for a level of excitement that was no longer a part of daily life in the increasingly civilized modern world.¹⁰ Yet this evocative notion has never been explored in rigorous historical fashion. Instead it has been deployed in the more contemporary analyses of figurational sociology, while the historical work of Dunning and his colleagues focused once again on instances of violence. In turn, historians directed their attentions to the ideals and ideas that were seen as driving the development of modern spectator sports, with notions like Muscular Christianity garnering attention over the effects that these sports had on spectators.¹¹

In his pioneering history of sports spectators Allen Guttman suggests that his contemplations were limited by a lack of evidence from before the twentieth century that historians have always faced.¹² Yet when it comes to the history of the modern spectator sports which developed from the mid 1800s, the issue has not been so much about a lack of evidence as in the time it could take to gather the relevant evidence. Sports like the football codes and baseball quickly came to be of great interest to the newspaper industry that was also going through a boom that would become linked in at least some cases, to their increasing coverage of sports.¹³ The problem was the time-staking task of going through each relevant newspaper source to glean the appropriate needles out of haystack of newspapers. This was an even greater issue for

those scholars seeking to provide a *cultural* history of spectator sports which shed light onto the meanings that these sports came to hold. As Bob Nicholson notes:

A central feature of cultural history has been its focus on the close examination of written and spoken texts, on the power of representation and place of discourse. An exploration of these discursive formations has fostered some valuable interdisciplinary work, but tracking cultural ideas across “a vast terra incognita of print” (Leary *Digital Age* 206), whilst valuable and productive of exciting new insights, was severely limited in the pre-digital age. There were only so many texts that any scholar could be expected to study.¹⁴

This did not make cultural histories of spectator sports impossible. Michael Oriard for instance, was able to provide an acclaimed multi-volume history of American football. Nevertheless, in the volume that dealt primarily with newspapers – the pioneering *Reading Football* – Oriard mainly limited himself to papers from one geographic area, and crafted a media history rather than exploring the emerging spectator culture whose passionate attachment comes, in his work, to seem like a byproduct of the medium.¹⁵ While the rise of spectator sports was clearly intertwined with the development of the popular press, the emotions of spectators again are largely unexamined in Oriard’s otherwise impressive cultural history of the emergence of American football, with evocative quotes adding interest like photographs but not the subject of analysis for their own sake.¹⁶

Perhaps the reason for the lack of cultural histories of the emotional spectator cultures that developed around sports like baseball and the football codes is due to the difficulty of analyzing emotions. This is not only an issue with the history of sport. Indeed, as Daniel Wickberg observes, the “life of emotions, desires, and inclinations is oddly absent from most of the concepts that historians have used to understand the deep structure of belief systems.”¹⁷ At issue is the way the cultural history of emotions and sensibilities moves beyond a concern with objects of representation (such as persons and things), to issues of perception and feeling that while never unmediated can shape meaning in powerful ways and which can reveal much about the history of

mind/body relationships. The problem here as Wickberg also notes, is that these “sensibilities are not organized in archives and conveniently visible for research purposes; they are almost never the explicit topics of the primary documents we use.”¹⁸

In other words, histories that seek to trace the rise, ebbs and flows of emotional cultures – of examining feelings as well as ideas, behaviors and values – have faced further methodological issues that have limited the number of sources that can be searched. For it is not a matter of finding the right archive or newspaper heading/section, but of the time-consuming search through an assortment of texts for the language, observations and side-notes that hint at cultures of feeling and the world-views bound up in these. And it is here that the digital turn offers a vital resource in (re)turning to the history of modern spectator sports.

SOME POLITICS AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE DIGITAL TURN

The digitization of sources may still be relatively new, but it has already created the enduring historiographical trope that this entails a move from a scarcity of sources to abundance or indeed overabundance of sources.¹⁹ Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette have pointed to the necessity of still attending to those sources which are not digitized and to the attendant politics that inform the digitization of certain sources over others.²⁰ This critical attention to sources and their use fits within the historiography of sport which as Fiona McLachlan has recently noted, has tended to be occupied with debates over “the choices historians make in terms of their sources, forms of analysis, and modes of representation.”²¹ Such debates are vital, however as McLachlan has also argued, there is a concurrent need to discuss “the questions historians ask, what their histories are about, and the political consequences in terms of social inequality and oppression.”²²

The digital turn – and its possibilities – make this issue seem even more urgent to me. Previously the kinds of questions that historians could productively ask were limited at least in part by the relatively scarce sources available or often by the difficulty in searching through these sources. Now where sources are more than plentiful and

searching them is often disconcertingly easy, we can ask more questions of these sources than ever before.²³ Which means that the way we choose which questions to ask is potentially even more important. For while we can ask so much, our finite time and resources still limits how many questions we can answer, and thus raises the query of what historical issues are most in need of exploration. The aim here is not to try and delimit what historians can study, rather I want to stress that the digital turn only increases the need for critical historical practice where we think through not only the why, what and how of our historical practice, but also the significance of our histories.

It is with this in mind that I think it is worth returning to the gap in the historiography of modern spectator sports. When the former elite Australian Rules footballer Tim Pekin took a 70-year-old Korean Kung-Fu Grand Master to a game of Australian Rules football in Melbourne, his guest was struck less by the game than by the spectators whose behavior he found inexplicable. Towards the end of the game the Grand Master stated “incredulously, as if solving a riddle: ‘Everybody mad!’.”²⁴ It was a reaction emblematic of those outsiders who attend modern spectator sports for the first time. Indeed metaphors of both pathology and intense religious devotion abound in contemporary descriptions of sports fans by both insiders and outsiders.²⁵ Fans are variously “mad”, “obsessed”, “addicted”, “faithful”, and “true believers.” Yet if the most striking element of modern spectator sports is the fervor of those who follow them, this is not reflected in the histories of these sports. Indeed I have come across no histories that rigorously explore the pathologization of supporters over time, nor their imputed fanaticism, adoration, and the religious-like meaning ascribed to these sports.²⁶

The importance of this extends beyond the problematic way our histories of spectator sport thus far shed little light on the fervent spectator cultures that currently characterize these sports. Contemporary spectator sports tend to be at the heart of popular culture around much of the world. They are institutions of immense social, cultural, economic and political power. And for all the pleasure and social connections that they facilitate, these sports are also a key site for the production, shaping,

regulation and sometimes transformation of popular understandings of gender, race and sexuality, and are implicated in social problems such as misogyny, homophobia, racism, excessive gambling and at times violence.²⁷ I would suggest that much of the power of sports like baseball, cricket and the football codes lies in great meaning that they provide for those who follow them. Histories of this meaning – and the emotional cultures bound up in this – will *not* by themselves transform or reshape the problematic aspects of modern spectator sporting culture. Nevertheless, it remains an important truism of historical practice that interventions in the present should be grounded by understandings of how the past shaped the present.

If issues with sources limited the possibilities for histories of the passionate cultures that emerged around modern spectator sports, then the digital turn offers the potential to move beyond these limits. More specifically, the digitization of historical newspapers along with magazines, journals and books, creates the possibility for what Nicholson terms “Cultural History 2.0.”²⁸ As he explains:

the development of keyword search technology has made it possible to trace the development and movement of ideas and discursive formations in ways that were once impossible. In other words, this is cultural history, but not as we know it. The emphasis upon the importance of language and discourse remains, but the analytical tools at our disposal have been sharpened and expanded.

One key element of this search technology is the digital-specific methodology of “distant reading” that Murray Phillips, Gary Osmond, Stephen Townsend have already explored in terms of the history of sport.²⁹ A related option is to utilize Ngram viewers which provide graphs representing the number (or at times proportion) of keywords and phrases in archives such as Google Books, but by themselves, these viewers give little sense of the meaning or context of these terms and phrases.³⁰ Another alternative that engages with the emotional dimension is sentiment analysis, however this is often crude in that it divides emotions into categories of positive, negative and neutral, whereas I am interested in the way that phrases such as “football fever” could be used in both celebratory and pejorative ways.³¹

A thus-far less utilized possibility is the chance to chart the development and evolution of key terms and phrases over a relatively brief period of time by way of a close examination of all the (digitally) available uses of these terms or phrases. If the previously “vast terra incognita of print” made it very hard to thoroughly explore the emergence of phrases like “football mania” and “baseball fever” along with terms like (baseball) “cranks” and (football) “barrackers”, the digitization of much of this print in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia makes it considerably easier. In August 2016 there were, for example, 508 results for “barracker” in the National Library of Australia’s Trove database for the period from 1880-1892, 322 results for “football fever” in the British Library’s digital newspaper archive for the period from 1880-1899, and 323 results for “baseball crank” in the Chronicling America newspaper archive for the period from 1880-1892.³² There are important questions as to the sources in these digital collections, the technologies they use and the financial costs of using them.³³ Yet while the results of these searches are not exhaustive or necessarily completely representative of the print archive, they can provide a starting point for a close reading of key terms and phrases that begins the process of tracking the seemingly new cultural ideas, experiences, behaviors and emotions that were a key part of the emergence of baseball, Association football and Australian Rules football as spectator sports in the late 1800s. Moreover, they enable the kind of comparative exploration that has been sorely lacking in the histories of modern spectator sports.

The increasing digitization of textual sources enables the kind of broad-scale comparative history that was either previously unthinkable, or only possible as a second or third wave development after a first wave of detailed local studies that can then be compared on a national and then international scale.³⁴ However, few historians have advocated the use of digitized sources for comparative sources. Perhaps this is due to a decline in comparative history shaped by the so-called transnational turn and concurrent critiques of the presumed neutrality of previously comparative literature.³⁵ Yet as Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt note, while there is frequently “much tension” between comparative and transnational

approaches, there is also the possibility for “productive and innovative co-operation between” the two.³⁶ Indeed, contemporary comparative analyses can be informed by the transnational critique, paying attention not only to porous national boundaries, but also to questions of power and the dangers of contrasting the (supposed) margins by means of the perspectives and values of the (assumed) center.³⁷ Moreover, while transnational studies can point to the circulation of people and ideas, and the networks and processes that shape and facilitate these, comparative studies can highlight important disconnects and differences, as well as highlight the emergence of similar cultures around different cultural products. In the case of modern spectator sports, for instance, baseball, Association football and Australian Rules football all became popular at a similar time in quite different parts of the Anglophone world. Comparison in this instance is not about which culture was the best, but rather what we might learn of their similarities and differences, and how developments in one country might shed light on what was happening in another.³⁸

In the rest of this paper I draw from the previously discussed example of digital searches around the term (baseball) “crank” in the US from 1880-1890, “barracker” in Australia from 1880-1892, and “football fever” in the UK from 1880-1899, to see what this suggests of the possibility of a digitally-assisted comparative cultural history of the emergence of modern spectator sports in these countries. I do not have the space here to provide a detailed trajectory of what digital sources indicate of the history of these terms and phrases. Instead I will provide some further snippets that give a sense of the way the more passionate sports followers came to be characterized in these three countries, and of what this might add to our current understandings of the emergence of modern spectator sports. In particular, I want to explore the way that descriptions of the fervor of these sports followers almost inexorably led to tales of the bodies, as well as minds, of the new sports followers.

SNIPPETS OF SPECTATORS IN THE US, AUSTRALIA AND THE UK

Earlier in this paper I quoted Wickberg’s claim that there are no archives for emotions and sensibilities more broadly, and that these are generally not the primary interest of the sources that we use. Notwithstanding this, the results of keyword searches for

cranks, barrackers and football fever suggest there was a keen interest – at times even fascination – in the emotions of those who had come to follow baseball, Association football and Australian Rules football in the late eighteenth hundreds in parts of the United States, United Kingdom and Australia.

The term crank initially had no relationship to sport in the United States of America. Harking back to both the German “krank” for “sick” and a similar British term for the “high-spirited”, crank came to prominence in the US in 1881 as a term designating the seemingly madman Charles Guiteau who was on trial for murdering President James Garfield.³⁹ Within a few years “crank” was being used to denote those who seemed crazed or obsessed. Baseball was just one of many sites of popular culture where the term was used from the early 1880s, but there was something about the emerging spectator culture around baseball that led the word to stick, and for around a decade in many cities around the US it became the standard term for the more passionate baseball supporters. This much, as I indicated earlier, is known.⁴⁰ Yet what this the designation reveals of both the emotions of many baseball followers *and* of how others responded to these emotions is yet to be explored.

At least one inference is clear. There was something about baseball that seemed to drive certain people towards madness. This was highlighted by an anecdote that was retold with minor variations in 1884 in newspapers from Cleveland, Eugene City (Oregon), Lynchburg, Mile City (Montana), Philadelphia, Salem (Indiana), and St Louis. Purportedly taken from a letter written by a former Governor of Maryland, the anecdote spoke of “a man in the Government Hospital for the Insane who is perfectly sane on every subject except base ball.”⁴¹ The man knew “more about base ball than any other man in America” – he had covered the walls of his “large room” with the records of every significant base ball game ever played, and had “figured out” an astrological explanation for the result of every game. The punch-line was that such behavior was to be expected when it came to baseball. “His sense has gone with it. He is the typical base ball crank.”⁴²

While many descriptions of cranks generalized them as a unified group, some accounts sought to distinguish the differences between them. In 1884 for example, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* described a series of archetypal baseball cranks including “the Blushing Lass who thinks the players so cute, The Small Boy with Large Lung Power and a Faculty for Using It, The Excited Man, the Quiet Man and Other Men.”⁴³ A year later the *Boston Daily* detailed the “so-called” male and female cranks who frequented baseball games in the city, “All of them are more or less prominent from their eccentricities or peculiarly cranky notions.”⁴⁴

The pathologization of these supporters seemed to be based on two things. Firstly an obsession with the game, and secondly a tendency to become very emotional while watching the games. In 1888 a stinging column in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* spared little detail in describing both aspects of the “mentally aberrated individuals” who were baseball cranks, beginning with their problematic expression of emotions:

The crank is always in the front at ball games, is at all times ready to gush over with enthusiasm or equally as expert at growling and grumbling at an unfortunate or bad play. He does nothing by halves; when he is tickled by a remarkably brilliant piece of work he not only enthuses, he gets crazy. He halloas [sic], and whoops, and yells, and shouts and shrieks and yelps and stamps and bangs vociferously and it would seem that his good humor could not be overturned by any ordinary process—but it can. Before he has finished making the surroundings ring with exultation somebody on the diamond makes a bad play—somebody on his side of course—and then the revolution comes. He sighs and evidently feels bad; he raves and curses and swears and rails and tears his hair and abuses the player who makes the misplay and shouts at him in some such strain as, “Ah you are no good,” “Get off the earth,” “Go and ask for your release;” and other equally as complimentary remarks.⁴⁵

The pathological cranks were “ubiquitous” and “confined to no one walk in life” complained the *Sentinel*. “Bankers, brokers, speculators, insurance men, merchants, authors, journalists, brewers, manufacturers, butchers, bakers, milkmen, candle-makers, mechanics, policemen, laboring men of every description and women of all

degrees go to make up the array.” And the problem was that they could not stop talking about the game, you could meet them anywhere and they would begin trying to convince:

you that such and such a club is sure to win the pennant, no matter whether it is then at the bottom and losing steadily, or they are equally as emphatic in pronouncing that another club which may be then in the lead and winning steadily will never get the much coveted bit of bunting. ... And if you won't be convinced, they say you are insane and laugh at you.

At issue here then were both bodies that were out of control – growling and grumbling and then bursting forth in celebration or anger – and minds were fixated on the one thing, and a mere game at that.

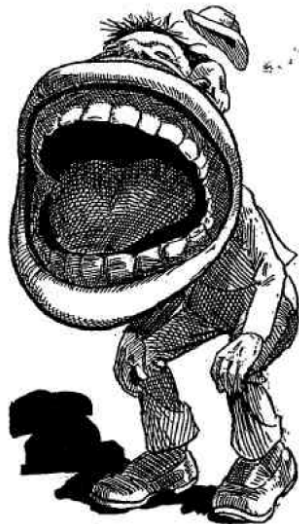
Other sources hint more fully at some of the specific emotions at play. A fascinating poem from 1890 in Portland’s *Morning Oregonian* points to the relief that might come at the end of the season when hopes were no longer being continually fueled and then dashed. Titled the “Reverie of a Baseball Crank” the poem noted that while the coming of winter was the “saddest” time of the year, the crank was “full of joy because/ the baseball season’s over.”⁴⁶ The crank’s “voice” was “in the doctors care/ From many a loyal scream”, and their summer salary was “gone/ In bets on Portland's team”, nevertheless they were happy because “hope no longer comes to grief/ With Tommy in the [batting] box.”

One question that I hope to explore in later work is how this spectator culture changed, or did not change, over time, even after “fan” had largely replaced the term “crank”. A striking cartoon from 1911 a cartoon in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* suggests some considerable continuity around the importance of hope in the emotional economy of baseball. Titled “The Conservation of Lunacy is the Life of the Baseball Business”, the cartoon shows the a man who seems to be the Chicago Cubs owner Charles Murphy convincing a supporter to hope the Cubs might recover from a seemingly hopeless position to win the World Series.⁴⁷ Once the supporter comes again to hope Murphy has him locked up in the asylum from where he will presumably

be released at game time so that he can pay once again to watch the Cubs lose. The physical transformation of the supporter is notable – he moves from a maudlin depression at the hopelessness of it all to the excitement of hoping again, to the disheveled craziness of living in the asylum with the belief that the Cubs will win the World Series.



Bodies were also at the forefront of the cartoons of those supporters of Australian Rules football deemed “barrackers.” A term of contested etymology, “barracker” differed from crank in that it appears to have been first developed to denote passionate sports followers.⁴⁸ However, the term was similar to crank in that it was initially pejorative, for the word referred to those who “barracked”, that is jeered loudly or shouted out abuse. As can be seen from a (Melbourne) *Punch* illustration of 1892, this very embodied act of yelling that was caricatured so lovingly by Silas Snell was also at the forefront of visual depictions of barrackers.⁴⁹



IDEALS.—No. 5.
THE BARRACKER.

The shouting of barrackers also concerned some sports journalists, with “Follower” writing in the (Melbourne) *Leader* that:

“Barracking” has become such an inseparable characteristic of the game, and is now carried to such a senseless extent, that fair comment from the mass of those who allow themselves to become victims to excitement need never be expected; for men who commence to roar and rave when the ball is first kicked off can hardly be expected to judge the merits of the game dispassionately, and I am afraid that your real red hot “barracker” is as a rule singularly blind to that which he would rather not see.⁵⁰

To later critics it seemed that the barrackers were choosing excitement of the body over sustenance for the mind, with dire consequences for their mental ability. In an emblematic example from 1889, a columnist for the (Melbourne) *Weekly Times* was both appalled and fascinated by the way barrackers “contorted their faces and their bodies” all the while, “yelling” themselves hoarse.⁵¹ “What will become of the great army of barrackers” asked the columnist, their “brains are out, but the men don’t die.” Thus although the term barracker did not directly reference pathology, critiques of the behavior of barrackers tended to see the culture of passionate football spectatorship as having clearly deleterious consequences for both the minds and bodies of those affected.

No new word gained popular currency in the UK for the new sports followers, perhaps because there was a greater continuity with earlier spectator cultures around sports like village football, pedestrianism and cricket.⁵² Instead, references to pathology abounded, especially through the soon-to-be popular phrase, “football fever”. The implication was that Association football inflamed and troubled the bodies of those who followed it passionately. As the *Blackburn Standard* noted in an emblematic aside in 1884, “thousands of persons in this town and district have for many months been suffering acutely.”⁵³

Again excitement was a precondition for the purported disease, with the *Birmingham Daily Post* commenting in 1887 that the unusual excitement of the two leading local clubs playing against each other had led “the Birmingham public” to experience “the first and worst stage of its football fever.”⁵⁴ And in keeping with accounts in both the US and Australia, the *Birmingham Daily Post* observed on the eve of the 1890-91 season that the “epidemic” of “football fever” had “spread at such a rate that all sorts and conditions of people take the liveliest interest in the game; men of business gravely discuss the chances pro and con of the big clubs and football is now talked of in places where a few years ago it would have been considered infra dig to have mentioned it.”⁵⁵ (This turn of phrase was seen as so apt that the same paragraph appeared a few weeks later, without attribution, in the *Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*).⁵⁶

A year later the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* pointed to the bodies of football supporters that showed all the signs of the fever:

“Amusement is the first necessity of civilised man,” said Voltaire. Civilised Yorkshiremen are no exception. We are reminded forcibly of this fact by the evidence that the football fever is developing as the days shorten, and will, during next month, be epidemic raging, in fact. It may or may not be a gratifying sign of the times that ten or twenty thousand people excitedly crowd, and strain and howl whilst score of athletes, who are kept, trained, fed,

and well paid for the purpose, strive and struggle over a bag of wind. But the people will have it so, and in their sport they demand what they please.⁵⁷

There was a stark contrast here with the general “civility” of cricket spectatorship as highlighted in a 1906 cartoon celebrating the chaos that would accompany the coming Association football season that heralded the end of that year’s cricket.



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Not all emerging spectator sports then were depicted as having seemingly similarly fervent emotional cultures, and it is noteworthy that there are only 26 results for “cricket fever” in the in the British Library’s digital newspaper archive for the period from 1880-1899.⁵⁹ This cartoon highlights the importance of further contextualizing the findings of keyword searches while at the same time drawing attention to emotional cultures that are yet to be examined in any great historical detail.

CONCLUSION – THE BODIES OF SPECTATORS

This paper has drawn on three digital archives to begin tracing the uses and meanings associated with key terms and phrases that were deployed to describe and represent the zealous spectator cultures that emerged around baseball, Association football, and Australian Rules football in the late 1800s. The increasing digitization of newspapers, journals, magazines and other textual sources has made this kind of cultural history 2.0 much more achievable than was previously the case. Moreover, it has created the possibility for the kind of comparative study that I think is essential for the further development of histories of modern spectator sports. Nevertheless, I am not recommending that this be the only method of digital history that we engage in, or that we only engage in digital histories. The broader project that this paper has drawn from utilizes distant reading along with non-digitized archives. What the various fragments and snippets that I have explored in this paper point to is the way certain keyword searches might provide entry points into emotions and sensibilities that are yet to be the focus of historical research. In addition, they also point to the importance of also considering the bodies of spectators. The last few decades have seen an increased focus on the body as a key site of consideration and analysis by sport historians.⁶⁰ The bodies that have been studied however, were those of athletes or would-be athletes. Historians, like fans, have tended to focus on the actions occurring on playing fields rather than in the stands. The digitized sources compared in this paper, however, point to potentially key roles being played by the highly excited, pathologized bodies of fans.

In a way then, this initial foray into a digitally-assisted history of the cultural that emerged around three modern spectator sports can be seen as confirming the “quest for excitement” theory of Elias and Dunning. The abundant and continual references to pathology however, point to something that is potentially more complex. For Elias and Dunning, the modern search is for moments that are exciting, but not *too* exciting – that is a quest for experiences that are “not seriously perturbing and dangerous as is often the case in real life”, hints of danger that somehow “lose their sting.”⁶¹ Yet what I find striking about the fragments and snippets detailed in this paper is the sense

that the roller-coaster of emotions experienced by these new sports followers verges on being too much to cope with. The metaphors of pathology often intimate significant bodily suffering as well as joy, of the need to yell and hoot in distress as well in triumph, and to watch as if in a trance because what is occurring seems more important at that moment than anything else, while there are suggestions of pleasure becoming pain, of seductive hopes that lead towards lunacy and which it can be a joyous relief to shed after a disappointing season.

One of the standard explanations of the emergence of modern spectator sports is that they were developed in order to foster the growth of boys into strong men of discipline and courage. This preliminary history of cranks, barrackers and football fever offers the possibility of a counter-narrative that sports like baseball, Association football and Australian Rules football became popular for the way they excited the bodies of some spectators so much that they became painfully and pleurably obsessed. Further use of digital and non-digital archives is needed to get a clearer sense of the effects these sports seemed to have for those who came to follow them and the way this might complicate notions of just what constitutes active sporting bodies. Other keyword searches and methods of data mining might provide alternative entry points into the emotions and sensibilities that became a vital part of modern spectator sport cultures. There is also more to be explored around issues of the gender of supporters and the gendered representations of their passions, along with questions of civility, degeneration, the normal as opposed to the pathological, the theatrical play of pathologization, and the possibility that instead of turning boys into men, modern spectator sports created a space where the watching men and sometimes women could behave once again like children.

¹ *Boston Globe*, 1 October 1887, 3.

² Silas Snell [Edward Dyson], "The Barracker," *Melbourne Punch*, 23 May 1889, 15.

³ "Notes and Pastimes," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 February 1891, 4.

⁴ See for example, Paul Dickerson, *The New Dickson Baseball Dictionary*, 3rd Ed. (New York: Harvest Books, 1999), 223-224.

⁵ See for example, Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson, Bob Stewart and Greg de Moore (eds.), *A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football* (Melbourne: Penguin, 2008).

⁶ See for example, Dave Russell, *Football and the English* (Preston: Carnegie, 1997).

⁷ For more on the use of photographs in sport history see Gary Osmond, "Photographs, Materiality and Sport History: Peter Norman and the 1968 Mexico City Black Power Salute," *Journal of Sport History*, 37.1 (2010): 119-137; and Murray Phillips, Mark O'Neill, and Gary Osmond, "Broadening Horizons in Sport History: Films, Photographs, and Monuments," *Journal of Sport History*, 34.2 (2007): 401-421.

⁸ See for example, June Senyard, "The Barracker and the Spectator: Constructing Class and Gender Identities through the Football Crowd at the turn of the Century," *Journal of Australian Studies* 62, September (1999): 46-55; and Eric Dunning, Patrick Murphy, and John Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism: An Historical and Sociological Study* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁹ This has been especially true in studies of football in the United Kingdom. See for example, Gary Armstrong, *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998); and John Williams, 'Having an Away Day: English Football Spectators and the Hooligan Debate,' in John Williams and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *British Football and Social Change: Getting into Europe* (Leicester and London: Leicester University Press, 1991), 160-184.

¹⁰ Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, "The Quest for Excitement in Leisure," in Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (eds.), *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 63-90.

¹¹ Matthew Klugman, "'It's That Feeling Sick in My Guts That I Think I Like the Most': Sport, Pleasure, and Embodied Suffering," in Richard Pringle and Murray Phillips (eds.), *Examining Sport Histories: Power, Paradigms, and Reflexivity* (Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, 2013), 159-191.

¹² Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 135.

¹³ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980); and Steve Tate, "James Catton, 'Tityrus' of The Athletic News (1860 to 1936): A Biographical Study," *Sport in History*, 25.1 (2005): 98-115.

¹⁴ Bob Nicholson, "The Digital Turn: Exploring the Methodological Possibilities of Digital Newspaper Archives," *Media History* 19.1 (2013): 59-73, 63. For further reading on cultural history see Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

¹⁵ Oriard, *Reading Football*.

¹⁶ See for example the quotes of surprise, astonishment and "shouts and yells" on page 92, and of "a game that kept the vast crowd on its feet yelling during the whole afternoon" on page 107, Oriard, *Reading Football*.

¹⁷ Daniel Wickberg, "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New," *American Historical Review* Volume 112.3 (2007): 661-684, 670. There are close connections here, as well as some disjunctions, with the broader literature on the history of emotions. See for example Barbara Rosenwein, "Worrying About Emotions in History," *American Historical Review* 107.3 (2002): 821-845; Peter Burke, "Is There a Cultural History of Emotions," in Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills (eds.), *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004); and Peter Stearns, "History of Emotions: Issues of Change and Impact," in Michael Lewis, Jeannette Haviland-Jones, and Lisa Barrett, *Handbook of Emotions* (3rd ed.) (New York: Guilford Publications, 2008), 17-31.

¹⁸ Wickberg, "What Is the History of Sensibilities?," 669.

¹⁹ See for example Daniel Cohen, "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History," *Journal of American History* 95.2 (2008): 452-491, 455.

²⁰ Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette, "Meaningful Engagements: Feminist Historiography and the Digital Humanities," *College Composition and Communication* 64.4 (2013): 634-660.

²¹ Fiona McLachlan, "Gender Politics, the Olympic Games, and Road Cycling: A Case for Critical History," *International Journal of the History of Sport* DOI:10.1080/09523367.2015.1134500 (2016): 1-15, 13 note 9. McLachlan makes this comment with regard to the work of one of the historiographers of sport, Douglas Booth, but in my view the point extends more broadly to the recent debates in the historiography of sport more generally.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For a recent critical overview see Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast", *American Historical Review* 121.2 (2016): 377-402.

²⁴ Tim Pekin, "Winning Can Be Everything," *Age*, 12 June 12 2007, S5. See also Matthew Klugman, "'My natural environment has provided me with about fifty different

ways of expressing frustration": Mining the visceral angst of

Australian Rules football followers," *Emotion, Space and Society* 12 (2014): 24-31.

²⁵ Klugman, "'It's That Feeling Sick in My Guts That I Think I Like the Most'."

²⁶ There is an emerging historiography on modern spectator sports and religion, however there is yet to be any detailed historical explorations of religious metaphors and fan culture. See for instance Joseph Price, *Rounding the Bases: Baseball and Religion in America* (Mercer University Press, Macon GA, 2006); and Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge UK: Boydell, 2010).

²⁷ See for example, Toby Miller, Geoffrey Lawrence, Jim McKay and David Rowe (eds.), *Globalization and Sport: Playing the World* (London, UK: Sage, 2001).

²⁸ Nicholson, "The Digital Turn", 63.

²⁹ Murray Phillips, Gary Osmond and Stephen Townsend, "A Bird's-Eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading and Sport History," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32.15 (2015): 1725-1740.

³⁰ For more on this see Frederick Gibbs and Daniel Cohen, "A Conversation with Data: Prospecting Victorian Words and Ideas", *Victorian Studies*, 54.1 (2011): 69-77.

³¹ This is not to say that there is no place for sentiment analysis which can be used in productive ways as David Robinson showed in analyzing the purported campaign tweets of Donald Trump. See David Robinson, "Text Analysis of Trump's Tweets Confirms He Writes Only the (Angrier) Android Half," <http://varianceexplained.org/r/trump-tweets/>, accessed 10 August 10 2016.

³² These searches of the <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>, <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>, and <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/> digital archives were conducted on 18 August 2016.

³³ See Amanda Regan, "Mining Mind and Body: Approaches and Considerations for Using Data Mining to Identify Discourses in Digitized Publications", *Journal of Sport History*, 2017 [details to be completed once publication confirmed]; and Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable".

³⁴ There is a limiting factor here because digitization is not being conducted at the same rate across the world, and as Putnam notes the "early-twentieth-century Anglophone world has been ground zero of digitization", *Ibid*, 389. Yet as Putnam also notes, this imbalance "is changing rapidly", 390.

³⁵ See for example, Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn Radical History Review," *Radical History Review*, 91.Winter (2005): 62-90.

³⁶ Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, "Preface," in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational history: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), vii-viii, vii.

³⁷ See for example the collection of chapters in James Beattie, Emily O'Gorman, and Matthew Henry (eds.), *Climate, Science, and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³⁸ It is perhaps telling that the one paper that I have found advocating a comparative use of digitized sources comes from the history of science and technology where comparison has also often been conducted in a manner that does not seek to positively contrast the centre with the periphery, see Pim Huijnen, Fons Laan, Maarten de Rijke, and Toine Pieters, "A Digital Humanities Approach to the History of Science: Eugenics Revisited in Hidden Debates by Means of Semantic Text Mining," in Akiyo Nadamoto, Adam Jatowt, Adam Wierzbicki, Jochen L. Leidner (eds.), *Social Informatics* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2014), 71-85.

³⁹ Dickerson, *The New Dickson Baseball Dictionary*, 224.

⁴⁰ See also Peter Morris, "What it Means to be a Fan," Paper presented at the Society for American Baseball Research Convention, Denver, 2003. <https://www.press.umich.edu/resources/fantalk.pdf>

⁴¹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 April 1884, 5; *Cleveland Herald*, April 21, 1884; *Lynchburg Tri-Weekly Virginian*, April 23, 1884; *Sporting Life*, 7 May 5 1884; *Eugene City Guard*, 9 July 1884; and *Daily Yellowstone Journal*, July 24, 1884.

⁴² The Lynchburg Tri-Weekly Virginian even re-worked the tale to begin with the assertion that "the typical base ball crank is in the Government hospital for the insane at Georgetown." April 23, 1884.

⁴³ "Baseball Cranks" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 12 1884, 5.

⁴⁴ "At the Ball Grounds," *Boston Daily*, Jun 7 1885, 8.

⁴⁵ "King of the Cranks," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Sunday, June 17 1888, 10.

⁴⁶ "Reverie of a Baseball Crank," *Morning Oregonian*, October 19, 1890, 10.

⁴⁷ "The Conservation of Lunacy is the Life of the Baseball Business," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 September 23 1911, 10.

⁴⁸ Senyard, "The Barracker and the Spectator."

⁴⁹ "Ideals No. 5 – The Barracker," *Melbourne Punch*, 7 July 1892, 3.

⁵⁰ Follower, "Football Gossip," *Leader*, 18 July 1885, 21.

⁵¹ "The Football Barracker," *Weekly Times*, 17 August 1889, 4.

⁵² Russell draws attention to the need to consider continuities in his excellent *Football and the English*.

⁵³ "Notes by the Way," *Blackburn Standard*, 25 March 1882, 2.

⁵⁴ "Opening of the Wild West Show at Aston," *Birmingham Daily Post*, 07 November 1887, 5.

⁵⁵ "Note on Sport," *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 September 1890, 5.

⁵⁶ "Sevenoaks Excelsior v. Sevenoaks Town," *Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*, 10 October 1890, 5.

⁵⁷ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 1891, 4.

⁵⁸ "The Advent of Football," *Athletic News*, August 27 1906, 1.

⁵⁹ Search conducted on 18 August 2016.

⁶⁰ Klugman, "'It's That Feeling Sick in My Guts That I Think I Like the Most'."

⁶¹ Elias and Dunning, "The Quest for Excitement in Leisure," 80.