

THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN THE PENETRATION OF
URBAN CULTURE TO THE RURAL AREAS OF PERU

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INTRODUCTION

One aspect of Latin American culture and society that has been neglected by social scientists is the outstanding importance of competitive sporting games such as basket-ball, volley-ball, and especially soccer. The importance of soccer reaches from the local to the international level, beyond modern means of communication. Introduced to Latin America by European and American migrants immediately after the Wars of Independence, the game at first probably was played in British mission schools in the capital cities of various countries and spread from there to the local urban populations. From capital cities it diffused to provincial towns and finally to the most isolated villages of most of the countries.

At the national level, the playing of soccer, called in Latin America futbol asociado, is offered to the public as mass entertainment, and is served by a complex machinery that includes sporting fields both publicly and privately owned, national and regional leagues of teams, and clubs financed and supported by fans and educational institutions. Public information is served by specialized sportswriters and broadcasters. Public spirited persons are sought as patrons of clubs, and politicians give their support to teams at election times.

At the international level, the Latin American Committee of Foot-Ball organizes every year regional and international competitions in different countries. The events are attended by thousands of fans, and are eagerly followed in the press, radio and television. The passionate interest with which the events are followed and attended can be illustrated by some dramatic examples. In 1953, while the Peruvian and

the Brazilian teams were playing in Rio de Janeiro, many patients in the Tuberculosis Sanitorium of Bravo Chico in Lima, Peru, suffered severe collapse while they were listening to the events on smuggled radios hidden under their beds. In 1963 in Lima, Peru, more than 300 people were trampled to death in the stadium when an irate fan attacked the umpire and the public panicked at the attempts of the police to prevent a riot. In 1965, 8000 Chileans and 3000 Ecuadoreans "invaded" Lima by plane and bus to attend a match which was supposed to decide the national honor of the competing teams.

In capital cities of every country, the National Leagues are sponsored by the government and controlled by the Ministries of Education. The professional teams are sponsored by clubs supported by contributions from fans and money collected from the public. The players are professionals who work for a salary and offer their services to the highest bidder. The salaries they earn are probably somewhat higher than the salaries of the average white-collar worker in Latin America. The organization of professional soccer serves as a model and point of reference for the playing of the game in the rest of the country and is adhered to in the rest of the country. Informally, players and teams become models to follow and cultural idols to imitate.

The importance of the game at the international and national levels is indicative of the relevant place it occupies in Latin American society today, serving many functions for individuals and groups from the national to the local level. This can be very easily verified by any casual observer in either villages or cities when he takes a casual walk on the outskirts of town on a Sunday outing.

The study of professional soccer at the national or regional level would reveal many interesting aspects of national culture and society, but it would require a special project to follow all its implications. The purpose of this essay is to call the attention of social scientists to certain aspects of the game and its organization, as its

diffusion from the capital to provincial cities, towns and villages relates to the penetration of urban culture into the rural areas of Peru. The information used is of a general nature and it was gathered while doing field work in different parts of the country at different times during the last 20 years (see Escobar 1967; 1968).

For purposes of presentation, this essay will cover the following points: 1) the game of soccer as an indicator of acculturation to urban culture and of levels of integration to larger social units; 2) the organization of soccer teams and games as a model for voluntary associations and as a vehicle for the expression of leadership and social mobility; and 3) the effects of the game and teams on the social structure of the community and its integration into the urban culture. It is asked from the reader that throughout the essay he should keep very clear the fact that the game itself and its organization, while they are related, constitute two different aspects that at times have to be dealt with separately.

I

It has been shown in the introduction that in capital cities professional soccer is highly organized and financed, supported by clubs of fans and by sale of the game to the public as entertainment. In Peru, the National Commission of Foot-Ball passes a set of rules for the playing of the game and for field regulations, and establishes the classification of teams for their participation in professional playing. This set of rules is taken as a norm by all other sporting organizations throughout the country. Since about 1850, the playing of the game has diffused to the rest of Peru as a sport that is taught in schools as part of physical education and is played in every public event that the schools organize in their communities. From the schools it has passed to the public, and soccer leagues that are formed in every provincial city, following the regulations established in Lima. However, the important

thing is that the game has diffused independently from its more complex organizations and has become incorporated as a children's game in practically every community, sometimes displacing some other traditional games such as bochas or the Basque ball game (pelotaris). The simplest expression of the game is that of a group of children, in a more or less disorganized competition, kicking a ball made of socks stuffed with rags or wool. When the government or a missionary group has established a school in the community, the children are organized in regular teams by the teachers and the game is played during rest periods. Sometimes tournaments are organized for Sundays, and any field that is large enough and has been set apart for the purpose is used. In the normal course of events, what happens is that the children will continue playing the game every day after school and will become organized more or less spontaneously following the leadership of the best players.

When the school has been in the community for a number of years, a fresh crop of players is added to those who have already passed school and the game becomes a normal entertainment event in the community. A variable number of teams will be formed in the community and many young adults will be active in the organization of the events. If the means of communication allow it, the local teams will invite teams from other towns to play. Eventually, if enterprising leaders (called dirigentes), exist, the teams may form a league that includes various towns. A good example of this was recorded in the town of Yunguyo, on the shores of Lake Titicaca in 1959. Here an enterprising and public-spirited tailor first had organized a league of nine teams in the town and then had managed to convince a number of Indian communities to organize teams and to donate some of their fields for playing and practice. Another example was that of the province of Lampa, where the subprefect (that is, the main political authority), who had been a professional player in Cuzco, organized another league province-wide and even took his teams to other provinces in the area. These two examples and many others show that,

while communities tend to be self-contained and even isolated in other respects, they become integrated into a larger social system when the game of soccer is involved and that the complexity of their organizations in leagues shows the level of absorption of education and urban culture.

At first the diffusion of the game was mainly through the schools. In the last twenty years, roads have been constructed faster than schools, and the game has been introduced also by the small trickle of migrants who return from the cities to their communities. Soccer leagues are found even in places where schools have not yet been introduced. In this way, one aspect of urban culture has reached already to the most isolated peasant communities in the highlands of Peru, and with many effects on local culture and society.

II

The organization of the soccer game can be divided in three aspects: 1) the learning of the game itself; 2) the organization of the team and/or club; and 3) the organization of a league for tournaments. Of the three, learning the game is the easiest. Many children learn the game first by playing informally and gradually progress to being expert players. The organization of teams, clubs and leagues requires other abilities and incentives and the participation of other members of the society. The enormous importance that the game has in Peru makes it an eminently flexible and efficient vehicle for the training of individuals and groups in tasks of leadership and organization for both corporate living and the formation of voluntary associations. The ways in which teams and leagues are formed are many, but the variations are mainly in details and circumstances. For purposes of explanation, I will present an hypothetical case of the formation of a team which could serve as a model for explaining how these teams are formed and how they become incorporated in clubs and leagues.

A group of adolescents in school who live in the same barrio in any town or village decide to organize a team. For this purpose, they select as their leader the best player and organizer of the game and they call him the dirigente. The dirigente, in addition to being a good player, must also have some other fairly subtle qualities: he must be able to command respect and authority, must be a good talker and must develop gradually a quality that is called in Peru "social consciousness," which means more or less that the leader should be sensible to the demands of public and social life that require altruism and high morals. Under the direction of their leader, they decide in a series of meetings the amounts of their contributions, the colors of the uniforms, the name of the team, the periods for training, and other details. When they consider that they are sufficiently trained, they send an invitation to a rival team in another barrio and ask for a meeting to decide the details of an engagement. Delegates are appointed to discuss the date and place of the engagement, umpires and judges are selected, and invitations are sent to prominent citizens in the barrios and to friends and relatives. A prosperous merchant or citizen is selected to donate a prize, and whether he accepts or not, the match is played on the accorded date.

The first match is considered their baptism as a team and is usually celebrated after the event. After they have played two or three games, if they have proved their worth, they usually attract a following of fans and a few voluntary sponsors may suggest that they become a club and that they apply for membership in the league of their category. The change from a team to a club requires more formal and complex organization, which is usually provided by the sponsors and the fans of the team. In a series of frequent meetings the members of the club and the team appoint a President, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and a number of members-at-large who take charge of the direction of the activities of the team and club. In many cases, while the wave of enthusiasm is high, they decide to write a body of statutory regulations and, usually, to extend

the functions of the club to some other social and cultural activities in addition to the game. The usual thing is that deliberations over writing the statutes become so involved that the club will continue its activities while following a set of informal unwritten rules that develop according to the circumstances.

Depending on the success of the team, the support of the fans and sponsors, and the attitude of the public, the continuity of the club either will be assured for a time or will disappear after a short time. In the large provincial towns where more or less stable leagues exist, the continuity of the club will depend very much on its ability to retain the good players who are tempted by offers from other teams or clubs. In organizations with long standing, the players are usually spoiled, or strong corporate pressures are exerted on them. The actual fact is that, while interest in the game continues, in any community at any time there will be a high turnover of clubs and teams, depending mainly on the turnover of adolescents and young men who pass from school to adult life.

With some changes, the organization of the soccer leagues follows more or less the organization of the clubs, with the addition of representatives of local municipal governments. At the level of both the league and the club, the individuals who participate in its activities have been exposed to a model of organization that has proved its efficiency and flexibility for the formation of voluntary associations of more or less prolonged permanence. It has been observed that in general the individuals who participate as dirigentes of teams and clubs are usually energetic and mobile, and that in serving their apprenticeships in these organizations they develop abilities that are later applied in other aspects of their social, political or economic life, at the same time that they transfer the organizational model to organizations that serve corporate needs in their communities.

The importance of the model is such that probably the only competition it may get is from the organizational model of the religious

cofradías and the political sindicatos. In the case of Peru, I can risk the opinion that participation in the organization of soccer games in small villages is one of the most important aspects in the background of the individuals who have been migrating in a massive way to the coastal cities during the last thirty years, as is shown in the information collected in Lima by William P. Mangin and Paul L. Doughty in their studies of migrant settlements in the city (Doughty 1967 and Mangin 1959; 1967). Especially the information collected by Doughty (1967:15-21) tends to show conclusively that the regional organizations of migrants are not only modeled on the organization of the sporting club, but that they devote a large part of their activity in the city to sponsoring soccer events outside of the professional leagues.

III

The incorporation of the soccer game at all levels of Peruvian society is obviously only one aspect of the diffusion of urban culture to provincial cities and peasant communities. However, the interest and the rapidity with which soccer is absorbed tend to show that it probably fulfills some local needs and functions. While a more complete investigation is wanting, some observations can be already recorded about the functions it performs in small communities and provincial towns.

One function it seems to perform in many small towns is that of facilitating the incorporation of outsiders who come to live in the towns as school-teachers, policemen or merchants. One good example of this was observed in the town of Nuñoa in Puno during 1967. The government had increased the educational facilities of the town by establishing a secondary school that brought to town about 20 new young teachers. Some of the teachers belonged to local families but most of them were strangers. Their reception was at first cool, but the teachers organized in the school two or three teams that were accepted into the local league. At the same time, they organized a series of festive and ceremonial

events fitted to their school calendar and invited the local authorities and representative mestizos. During the soccer matches and ceremonial events, relations were generally cool and formal, but after the events the teachers were invited to parties in people's houses and were engaged in conversations in the plaza and stores through which they became familiar with the town gossip and made known their desire to incorporate themselves. Thus they gradually built friendships and relationships with the town's people and began to participate in the political and social life. Some of the teachers who could not adapt to the town were transferred and replaced with others who were more sympathetic to the local population.

In the same town, as an adjunct to education, the game of soccer was also important in smoothing out class relations and as a help to social mobility. The teams formed in the school included players of all social classes and participation on the teams tended to give importance to the best players irrespective of social position. Thus players of Indian origin who were also learning to read and write in Spanish were encouraged and allowed to participate in deliberations and events, and were assured a higher measure of respect from the mestizos.

At all levels of rural society, the game of soccer seems to have replaced many of the traditional elements of group differentiation, identification and competition. Many of the local teams tend to show strong barrio affiliations. Thus they become symbolic expressions of the boundaries of local groups and the playing of the game channels in a fairly peaceful way the traditional competition of barrios. This shows many of the stresses in local social relations. In terms of inter-community competitions, at the same time that teams tend to become symbols of strong ethnocentric tendencies, the fact that they compete with teams of other towns, on neutral ground, in the playing of the game at the regional level, opens up the possibilities of identification with communities of a larger area than their own hometowns, and of integration with the urban culture that is gradually penetrating all of the country.

CONCLUSION

The present essay has pointed out the importance of competitive sports in Latin American culture and has concentrated mainly on various aspects of this relating to the game of soccer and its organization in Southern Peru. It has presented evidence to show the importance of soccer as an index of acculturation to urban culture and as an organizational model for the formation of voluntary associations, and it has provided some examples of the way in which the playing of the game has effects on the social structure of rural communities and regions.

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