SPORT SPECTATOR BEHAVIOUR: A META-INTERPRETATION

Weed Mike
(Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom)

Sport spectator behaviour has attracted much attention in the literature, much of which has focussed on dysfunctional behaviour (i.e., violence or disorder) and on soccer (e.g., Dunning 2001), seeking to explain such behaviour and contribute to policy (e.g., Carnibella 1996). Other research has examined spending patterns, but behavioural elements are rarely extrapolated as the prime purpose has been to assess overall economic impacts of fixtures, franchises or events (e.g., Hudson 2001). More recent studies have utilised concepts from tourism to examine impacts of travel on sport spectator behaviours (e.g., Weed 2002). This paper seeks new insights from these works through meta-interpretation.

Unlike the more widely used meta-analysis, meta-interpretation is an approach that synthesises primary qualitative research using a method underpinned by the same interpretive epistemology as the research itself (Weed 2005). It commences with a research area rather than a research question, with the focus developing as the synthesis progresses. Space precludes fully listing the 24 pieces of research included in the meta-interpretation, but the synthesis includes research on a range of sports (e.g., football, cricket, ice-hockey, American football and baseball) and from a range of disciplines (e.g., economics, management, psychology, sociology and marketing). Meta-interpretation involves synthesis through a number of iterations until original or additional insights no longer emerge.

The meta-interpretation shows that many spectator groups have a ‘one view’ approach to the world and the group’s place in it, often defining the group in opposition to some ‘other’ and in many cases uncritically adopting broader political discourses. Among more committed or highly identified members, there is a group-reinforced requirement to ‘perform’ the identity of the group, which in some cases can lead to dysfunctional or socially undesirable behaviours. Away sports spectators may experience ‘ritual inversion’ (Graburn, 1982), which can magnify behaviours. A strong but temporary feeling of ‘communitas’ or togetherness among away groups can exist, leading to a feeling that behaviours performed take place inside a ‘liminoid’ space (Turner, 1992) in which restrictive norms of everyday life are weakened, thus leading to untypical behaviours. Thus away spectators create a psychological place in which strong feelings of ‘communitas’ in sharing the spectating activity and its associated behaviours are experienced. The concern is that the ‘liminoid’ nature of such places may lead ‘ritually inverted’ spectators to feel that behaviours usually seen as socially undesirable are more acceptable.

Carnibella, G (1996) Football Violence in Europe
Graburn, N (1982) Anls Tsm Rsch 10(1)
Turner, V. (1992). In Turner, E Blazing the Trail