Sport, Social Stratification, and Social Mobility

KIN 101
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Major Concepts:

Sport, as a major American institution, is bound to market forces and market ideologies
- Social Differentiation - Categorizing people by age, height, occupation, race, or other personal attribute
- Social Stratification - When these attributes are ranked hierarchically (often seen as superior to inferior)
- Implies that inequality is recognized and to a large extent accepted and expected

Major Concepts (cont):

- Social Class - People that occupy the same economic rank belong to a social class but...
  - Not JUST economic
  - Occupation, education, income, pastimes
  - Music, food, cars, etc...
- Life Chances - Chances that one has to access the riches and rewards of a society (Sport, education & medical care for example) Rich have safety nets on this view

Capitalism:

- Refers to one of several economic systems that involve the means of producing and distributing goods and services
- Based on the accumulation and investment of capital by private individuals
- Class stratification is inherent (and necessary) in this system
Social & Economic Inequality:

- More Americans think the poor are poor because of a lack of effort than because of things beyond their control (including poor!)
- Because outcome is related to individual talents & efforts, results are fair
- So, people deserve their lot in life
- Social class inequity viewed as natural, not ideological or structural

Social & Economic Inequality:

- "Myth of meritocracy" – sport helps to reinforce this notion as well as the notion of egalitarianism
- Can be a challenge for the "better person" to rise to the top when social forces, including institutionalized sexism and racism are at work

Distribution of Wealth:

![Distribution of U.S. Wealth Ownership, 2001](chart.png)


Social Class & Sport:

- Preference for certain sports varies according to SES (see chart p. 269 in Eitzen & Sage)

Can you think of examples?
- Upper Class
- Working Class
- Lower Class
Match the sport!

Sport participation by SES:
- Wealthy more likely to play individual sports
  - Takes money (ski, sail, horses, etc)
  - Country club sports (golf, swimming & tennis)
  - Conspicuous consumption – must play the part!
  - Flexible (but busy) Schedules
- Working and lower class more likely to engage in team sports

Spectator Preferences:
- Mass media have helped to make some sports popular across SES (football, Basketball, Baseball)
- Still there are different fan preferences
- Ability to attend live is SES based to some degree
- Average cost for a family of 4 for Denver Broncos in 2001 for example was $426.00! (Eitzen & Sage, 2003)

Social Mobility & Sport:
- We tend to believe we have an “open” class system and we are able to move up the SES ladder
- In some cases, this is true of sport, in fact participation in college sport can often translate into a comfortable occupation outside of sport when your playing days are over
- For some – huge economic windfall but...
Myths of the Sport-as-Mobility-Escalator

- Sport Provides a free Education
- Participation in sport leads to a college degree
- A Professional Sports Career is Probable

- Sport is a way out of Poverty (especially for racial minorities)
- Women now have sport as a vehicle for upward mobility because of new opportunities
- A professional sport career provides lifelong security