

... only winning counts

analysis by the news media. Public awareness of the sport is acute... The aura is intoxicating; for players, it is absolutely stupifying. They will endure practically anything to be part of the team."

Nor is this an accident. Precisely because elitist sports are such a good ideological generator for the most authoritarian and competition-minded values of authoritarianism and capitalism, it has received constant backing and pushing over the years from the military, big business, and organized religion.

From the viewpoint of the owners, the small elite of top jocks does yeoman service. Not only do they help socialize the working class to the elitism that is so essential in keeping them divided one from the other, but they are also the perfect pseudo elite for workers to identify with — a beefsteak pseudo elite of brawn not brain, myth without power, and one completely under the thumb of the real bosses. So we learn our phony elitism.

Is the competitiveness taught by the sports establishment any less phony? The competitiveness is supposed to be directed only at the other workers, not at the management. The origin of all the competitiveness for starting places on varsity and pro teams is that same elitist split between players and fans. It is not necessary.

The money now spent on varsity teams and intercollegiate sports, for example, could be spent on intramural sports aimed at making everyone a player. If everyone was out playing they would have much less time to be fans. And if they had fulfilling, creative jobs, they wouldn't need to look for the pseudo satisfactions of being fans.

The competitiveness between opposing teams is also part of a pseudo world. What difference does it really make who wins and who loses in sports? Jake Gaudaur, Commissioner of the Canadian Football League, once perceptively remarked, "It matters not whether you win or you lose, just as long as the fans aren't sure in advance which it's going to be." The Financial Post, November 28, 1970. He perhaps should have added "and just as long as the fans think that it's important."

Capitalism, sport, and production

The question has been fairly thoroughly analyzed by my close friend Bob Kellermann:

One can say that the relationship between producers (players) is really not one of competition between teams but rather they co-operate to produce a product (commodity) just as in other capitalist enterprises. However,

here, unlike elsewhere, the product itself is the "spectacle of competition." Evidence that players consciously or unconsciously come to know this lies in the fact that there is a strong tendency to "fix" the game, i.e., produce the "appearance" of competition while at the same time actually co-operating. (Leonard Shecter gives scores of examples of this in his book "The Jocks") The "spectacle of competition" is, after all, only a spectacle, and its social function is served as long as the consumers (fans) believe there is competition. This is obvious in wrestling matches, where only particularly ignorant people believe in the appearance. The reality of fixed matches remains hidden to them. Similarly in horse-racing. (Only here almost all the bettors assume the thing is fixed, and try to figure out the pattern of fixes). "Perhaps the best proof of how

these contests are, after all, only the rules of a game (an illusion). The reality is that there must be both a winner and a loser in order for the spectacle-of-competition to have any meaning. So that in social terms the losers are just as essential to the spectacle as the winners.

This becomes much cleaner when one sees the spectacle of competition through the eyes of those who own and sell this product and who employ the workers (players) who produce it. What they want to see is a "good show." Who wins or loses is almost irrelevant, since the profits depend on the appearance of "good competition," not on who wins the game. This is obvious when one man owns both teams. (James Norris not long ago owned three teams in the National Hockey League.)

But it is just as true when there are different owners who run one

are paid receipts from the "winners.")

"The real competition, which is not just appearance is (i) the competition between producers to make the same team, (ii) the competition between owners of opposing leagues (although even here there is very strong evidence that although owners in opposing leagues compete for rookies, they usually have a "truce" on veterans). In the latter case we see the problem which capitalism inevitably faces — saturation of markets.

There are only so many commodities (spectacles-of-competition) which a particular market of consumers fans can absorb. This can result in owners of these spectacles competing to sell their products since not all will be able to dispose of them. Thus, when the AFL first started, the NFL owners opposed it bitterly because they saw it as a



the spectacle-of-competition is more important than whether there is real competition was the recent computer world championship of boxing. Here there was no fight at all, only the coming together of images, ghosts. Yet millions actually believed in the reality of the Marciano-Ali competition (and probably sat in their seats cheering)."

Winning is the only thing that counts

The "winning of the spectacle of competition is in fact the least important part of this social process, for it is the spectacle itself which is socially significant. Here we see that the reality is the exact opposite of the appearance, which in men's consciousness is expressed in the belief that winning is the only thing that counts. But obviously this winning is only important within the extremely narrow confines of the "rules of the game," which in

league together. After all, everyone knows that the owner of a losing team benefits from the appearance of a winning team at his arena where he collects the profits. And in the event that one team is too weak (i.e., cannot provide a marketable commodity when combined with another team in the spectacle) the other teams' owners will try to strengthen the losing team, which is a loser for all the owners in terms of profits.

The strengthening of losers in order to ensure the spectacle-of-competition, which ensures profits, is institutionalized in the draft, a process whereby the weakest teams — their competitive weakness on the field is almost certainly to be reflected at the box office — are allowed first choice of the new players. (Moreover, in the Canadian Football League, for example, the owners actually have a gate equalization pot, whereby those "losers" who attract fewest fans

threat to their profits, though they tried to disguise their real interest by alluding to the quality of football, etc. The AFL, being new in the market, had to break the "brand loyalty" of the NFL consumers and therefore sold their tickets (product) at a lower price. Of course they also tried to tap new customers by going to different cities if possible. But tv makes the market almost nationwide so competition was inevitable.

"Of course once their product caught on they raised their prices, and the consumers who benefited from this short (untypical in the stage of monopoly capitalism) bout of competition were once again facing monopoly rip-off prices. This brief bit of competition also helped the producers (i.e. players). While it lasted the AFL capitalists were forced to pay higher salaries in order to sign rookies to produce the same quality spectacle-of-

Continued on page 22