Journal of Festive Studies
Issue Six Call for Papers

Sport and Festivity (Guest Editor Laurent S. Fournier)

The Journal of Festive Studies, a peer-reviewed journal published on H-Net, invites submissions for its sixth issue, scheduled for publication in June 2024. This issue will include a guest-edited thematic section on “Sport and Festivities,” in addition to other submissions on festive studies more broadly.

The question of sports festivities, or more broadly of the relationship between celebration and sport, has rarely been dealt with systematically, even if sports events have occasionally been described as inherently festive (Eichberg 2009). There is, however, a sizable literature on the celebrations associated with major international sports meetings, i.e. the Olympic Games and the soccer/football World Cups (MacAlloon 1984 is one of the best-known examples). More localized studies have highlighted the crucial role that, say, “gymnastic festivals” played in late-nineteenth century France in building a revengeful ideology against Germany by promoting “fortification of the body” (Arnaud and Camy 1986; E. Weber 1980).

To a certain extent, all sporting events are endowed with a ritual dimension. The use of party codes (music and songs, group choreography, decorations, etc.) in the world of sports has mostly been addressed in works concerning football fans (Bromberger 1995). The festive, carnivalesque even, culture of sports fans – which one can easily observe in the “fan-zones” and in the stands of today’s stadiums – often carries over into the rituals created by athletes themselves, such as the “third half-time” of rugby players (Saouter 2000). More prosaically, there are sports festivals at all levels of the sports galaxy, from the smallest neighborhood club to the biggest world competitions.

One recurrent problem with the existing scholarship is that authors generally assume that partying and sport, though somewhat similar, belong to two very different universes. In many books and articles, festivity is characterized as promoting waste and excess, while sport is described as measured, aimed at optimizing the physical performance of athletes through rational training techniques. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1986) clearly pitted sport – a modern pastime linked to the era of rationalism and productivism – against the games and physical rituals that marked traditional celebrations and festivals. This theory was also championed by Max Weber (1971), who saw sport as a product of the spirit of capitalism, a practice marked by the Calvinist logic of effort and seriousness, and thus distinct from medieval or pre-modern bodily culture. From this perspective, festivity exists only as a complement to sports practice, an outlet, a moment of freedom occurring before or after sport, or a manifestation of jubilation by spectators encouraging their favorite teams from the outside. It has little in common with the disciplining of the body that sport encourages.
There is, however, a host of situations in which partying may be consubstantial with sport. In ancient Greece, but also in many traditional societies studied by anthropologists, sports games were preferentially organized on feast days because feast days were deemed auspicious occasions, when the gods could be effectively invoked to help athletes during their performances (Jusserand 1901; Van Gennep 2014; Guttmann 1978; During 1984; Vigarello 2002; Phillips and Pritchard 2003). The original Olympic Games, the funerals of prestigious figures, European medieval ordeals and tournaments, rites of initiation, seasonal festivals: all of them were opportunities for the community to get together and to blend the festive and the sportive. Some celebrations still bear witness to this logic – for example, when jousting and sports meetings are organized on the occasion of village festivals or individual and collective rites of passage in the French Languedoc region (Pruneau 2004). Similarly, certain gatherings meant to promote a strong sense of ethnocultural identity, such as the Scottish “Highland Games,” choose not to dissociate sporting and festive aspects (Webster 2011).

Outside of this traditional context, counterculture has transformed the sports movement since the 1970s, giving birth to new, more festive or carnivalesque practices. The transformation of track racing into road racing has thus been accompanied by the rise of a new, whimsical sensibility (Defrance 1989; Lacroix 1998; Bessy 1995). In turn, this has given rise to large-scale events that simultaneously advertise themselves as sportive and festive events. Meanwhile, in line with Californian beach and water sports, new, “alternative” or “lifestyle” sports have emerged over the past few decades. They, too, tend to incorporate the codes of partying and assert themselves as “fun,” in sharp contrast with the seriousness of standard sports competitions (Wheaton 2004). This hedonistic turn in sports practice needs to be elucidated before we can surmise the gradual reconciliation between sports and festivity (or absorption of the former by the latter).

For this thematic issue of The Journal of Festive Studies on “Sport and Festivity,” we welcome articles from a wide variety of fields (including, but not limited to: anthropology, history, sociology, folklore studies, performance studies, sports studies) and a focus on at least one of the following topics:
- sports festivals;
- the festive or carnivalesque culture of sports fans and athletes;
- traditional festivals and rituals that include a sporting dimension;
- the festive dimension of new “alternative” sporting events.

Scholars interested in submitting should upload their article (6,000-12,000 words) with an abstract (c. 250 words) and a brief bio statement (150 words max.) to the Journal of Festive Studies website by June 30, 2023. Please consult the author guidelines and our About page for more information on the journal before submission. If you have any further questions, please contact guest editor Laurent Sébastien Fournier (laurent.fournier@univ-cotedazur.fr).

In addition to traditional academic essays, we invite contributions that incorporate digital media such as visualizations, interactive timelines and maps, video and imagery, as well as interviews and book reviews.

*Besides our guest-edited sections, we always welcome submissions on a rolling basis, with no deadline for consideration. Please do think of us if your research or professional background touches on festive practices!*


