

Anthropology in Sporting Worlds

Knowledge, Collaboration,
and Representation
in the Digital Age

Edited by

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Series in Anthropology



VERNON PRESS

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www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:

Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200,
Wilmington, Delaware 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:

Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Anthropology

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025933077

ISBN: 979-8-8819-0241-4

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List of Acronyms

AAA	American Anthropological Association
AMBA	Area Metropolitana Buenos Aires
ANPIA	Associazione Nazionale Professionale Italiana di Antropologia
APE	Association de Protection des Enfants
CNGL	Comité National de Gestion de la Lutte
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FC	Football Club
FCFA	franc of the Communauté Financière Africaine
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSA	International Network of Sport Anthropology
INSEPS	Institut National Supérieur de l'Education Populaire et du Sport
KNVB	Royal Dutch Football Association
LLM	Large Language Models
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
NEOSport	New Economic Order Sport
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PSS	Protector Scoring System
SCT	Self-Confrontation Technique
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SfD	Sport for Development
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TCC	Titans Cricket Club
WT	World Taekwondo

Acknowledgements

The editors first thank all at Vernon Press for their help and support throughout the process of composing this volume. The idea for this book emerged from workshops held in what is now called the International Network of Sport Anthropology (INSA). While many of the initial attendees are featured here, we thank those whose work is not found in these pages, including Leo Hopkinson, Mike Crawley, Tom Fabian, and Eilis Lanclus, for their insightful comments and continued support. We thank the other authors for contributing chapters, for engaging with us in our discussions, and for being patient throughout this process. You have all been a pleasure to work with.

Sean thanks the Sport and Leisure Cultures Research Group at the University of Brighton for offering a stimulating space for the debate and discussion of sport from various disciplinary perspectives. Sean also thanks Annelies Geens, Ann Weemas, Noel Salazar and his other colleagues in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at KU Leuven for their support.

Ben first thanks his colleagues in the Anthropology Department at Durham University, for their support and patience during the journey from PhD student through to Postdoc. Durham's digital infrastructure made developing the International Network of Sport Anthropology possible and was crucial for collaborative work on this book. He also thanks the Anthropology Department for awarding money from its 'Global Anthropology Fund', which helped us to host INSA's first annual conference at Durham in 2024. Most importantly, Ben is grateful for his partner Laura, whose love and encouragement saw this publication through the final few hurdles.

Henrike – known as Kika – thanks her friend Julia Haß, with whom she began the path into Academia and who encouraged her towards the Anthropology of Sport. She also thanks the members of INSA, the 'Asociación de Alumnos de Nam Sung Choi' in Argentina, Aquila Taekwondo in the UK, the CEDESI research team at the University of San Martin in Buenos Aires, the Visual Anthropology Centre at Goldsmiths University of London, and the Anthropology Department at UCL. All are a great inspiration for how to do Anthropology well.

Thomas thanks his co-editors and the contributors to this volume. It is edifying to find up-and-coming scholars committed to the Anthropology of Sport – they are the future of the discipline. It has been an honour and pleasure to mentor and work with the young scholars in this book.

Foreword

By late 2020, we had all reached the most agonising stage of a PhD – trying to make sense of things. We had done ethnographic fieldwork on sport and were now back in the UK at our respective institutions. While parsing through our ethnographic data, we were dealing with the new reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tasked with thinking about a world that seemed long gone, we carefully formulated our interpretations to share with our supervisors over Zoom. While it was a lonely time, we began to meet our fellow cohort online, share ideas over a drink, and host joint writing sessions. Though we did not know it at the time, this move online presented a huge opportunity for the Anthropology of Sport.

Though sport occupies a huge part of human social life, the Anthropology of Sport remains a remarkably small sub-discipline. Anthropologists regularly publish excellent ethnographies on sporting contexts, yet there has been no field for them to coalesce around. The perception – in a discipline that has itself struggled for legitimacy – has often been that sport is too frivolous a topic for serious anthropological enquiry. Though this perception is now changing across Anthropology, previous attempts to cohere the Anthropology of Sport have nonetheless failed. In 1974, a group of scholars founded The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play (TAASP), from which came a volume called *The Anthropology of Sport* in 1985. In that book, Blanchard and Cheska marked out space for the sub-discipline to inhabit, yet their emphasis on sport was eventually subsumed again by play. In the following decades a handful of collected editions on sport were edited, but only alongside corollary activities like games and dance (i.e. Dyck, 2000; Dyck & Archetti, 2003). Scholars have been more successful in Asia, where the Japan Society of Sport Anthropology was established, with the *Japan Journal of Sport Anthropology* following in 1998. Unfortunately, their efforts have garnered little attention from international anthropology organizations in anglophone academia.

Fortunately, things are now changing. *The Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement* was published by Robert and Linda Sands in 2010 – the first collected edition solely on sport – beginning a decade of emergence for the sub-discipline. The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) began hosting sport panels at their conferences from the early 2010s, an effort organised by Noel Salazar. This eventually culminated in the Commission for the Anthropology of Sport, inaugurated at the IUAES in 2019 under the stewardship of Jerome Soldani and Luiz Rojo. During that same period, Nico Besnier, Susan Brownell and Thomas F. Carter produced their 2018 volume *The*

Anthropology of Sport: Bodies, Borders, and Biopolitics. This meticulous study of anthropological engagements with sport not only provided the sub-discipline with a foundational textbook, but argued convincingly that sport is vital to anthropology today. Suddenly, the Anthropology of Sport had reached both a critical mass of scholars and produced a definitive statement on the nature and importance of the field.

As PhD students, we eagerly sought out other members of this Anthropology of Sport community. Ben and Kika were studying sport alone in their more traditional anthropology departments, while Sean's sport department lacked anthropological voices. In September 2020, Kika (and contributor Julia) convened a panel at the Royal Anthropological Institute's annual conference, hosted online due to the pandemic. Their panel '*Moving bodies: mapping mobility and practices of sport, martial arts and dance in urban spaces*' was an opportunity for Ben to present his work to likeminded colleagues who might truly understand his research. The discussion was lively and excitable as we traded ideas and felt resonances amongst our work. Concluding the panel, Kika was eager to continue conversations and collaborate in the future. Recognising that the Anthropology of Sport faced a similar problem to Anthropology of Sri Lanka – where scholars are scattered across institutions – Ben saw an opportunity to connect with colleagues. He suggested an online writing group, where we could share work in progress, receive feedback, and discuss issues in the sub-discipline. This would provide the crucial support and critique not always available in our home departments. After a little effort in recruiting contacts and promoting the group, Ben hosted the first meeting on Zoom that October. The group has run regularly ever since, growing from a loose band of acquaintances into the International Network of Sport Anthropology (INSA), an academic association with over 150 members. INSA continues to provide a supportive and productive meeting place for scholars of sport across various disciplines.

After sharing our work for some time and getting to know one another, we became eager to craft our first publication together. In early 2021, Kika, Ben and Sean organized a panel called '*Ethics of body movements: Scrutinizing ethics of sports, martial arts and dance research*', where we were joined by chapter contributors Jasmin and Francesco. Though the focus was ostensibly on ethics, we soon recognised the integral role digital technologies were playing in our research contexts. Some of us were deploying such technologies in our ethnographic work, while others were explaining how digital media influenced their interlocutors' behaviour. 'The digital' felt ever-present in our sporting encounters, and thus, we took this idea back to the network and ran a series of workshops. We invited our members to reflect on the digital in their own fieldwork sites, and engage with us in a discussion about shaping a future volume, which – following one of Kika's contacts – was intended for Vernon Press. During

the process, we unearthed our key themes of Knowledge, Collaboration, and Representation and recruited Arthur and Gwyneth to our cause. Our thanks go especially to workshop participants Leo, Mike, Tom and Eilis, who contributed their own reflections and helped us establish this vision of the book. By Autumn, our proposal was ready, while Ben had also settled on a definitive name for our group. In October 2021, we submitted as representatives of the new 'International Network of Sport Anthropology'. Given that INSA began online, it seems fitting that our first publication addresses the digital world we work within.

Everyone brought their own expertise to the editorial team. Kika is an out-and-out visual anthropologist who has used video extensively in partnership with martial arts practitioners in Argentina. She oversaw our section on collaboration and contributed greatly to our discussion of methods across the book. As her work revolves around care – including intersections with class, gender and ethnicity – Kika also shaped many of the ethical considerations within this text. Ben's work with cricketers in Sri Lanka illustrates how aspects of sport affect fundamental matters of ontology and epistemology, which often constrain the potential for social change. Ben defined and shaped the scope of this book, was the lead writer of the introductory chapter, and oversaw the knowledge section. Ben also brought his previous experience to the final editing of chapters and compiling of the manuscript, so any typos or formatting errors are his alone. Sean's work explores the sensory ecologies of swimmers, their imaginaries of blue-spaces, and the potential subjectivities that emerge. Sean stumbled into 'the digital' after an interlocutor gave him their phone and asked him to capture their practice with it. He has since considered deeply how to convey the nature and experience of those practices and was a natural choice to lead our section on representation. Sean has been the driving force of this project. He has continually and consistently organised us, liaised with contributors and reviewers, kept us on track, and always holds us accountable. Though we have each taken up the slack and led the project when needed, Sean has shouldered the heaviest burden.

As PhD students at the time, we recognised that a well-known senior colleague would boost our chances of acceptance and could guide our first foray into book editing. Sean, therefore, invited his supervisor, Dr Thomas F. Carter, to write the afterword and asked him to be the senior editor on our team. Tom is a leading figure within the Anthropology of Sport, whose restless nature and approach to critique have sharpened our skills. Tom provided crucial guidance while we navigated the editing journey, always enabling us to learn and to grow throughout the process. We are extremely grateful for Tom's contribution, and this book would be a far less work without his patient, supportive mentorship.

This book offers a series of thought-provoking reflections on the anthropology of sport in the digital age. We hope you will enjoy engaging with these ideas and

invite you to discuss them with us by joining the International Network of Sport Anthropology (www.sportanthro.org). We are extremely grateful for the community that has grown since 2020, for our generous colleagues and their friendship. We are proud to have contributed to furthering the Anthropology of Sport. We trust that you will enjoy hearing from Tom about the future we could share in the afterword.

Sean, Ben, and Kika.

Introduction:

The Digital Fabric of Social Interaction: Knowledge, Collaboration and Representation in Sport

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Contemporary sporting worlds are rapidly changing. As digital technologies become more sophisticated, people are finding new ways to use them while playing, watching, teaching, and learning sport. The rapid rise in access to such digital technologies and media around the world continues to drive this innovation. Digital technologies have become central to sporting practice, and this, in turn, changes the way that people engage with sport. As a global phenomenon, sport is very visible evidence that the digital is now a social 'condition' of the worlds we inhabit. As anthropologists of sport, we have found ourselves dealing with the ramifications of this social condition, both during and after our fieldwork.

In this volume, we think through how 'the digital' impacts sporting practices and our own research on such contexts. None of the contributors to this volume set out to research 'the digital' as a topic, yet we all found that digital technologies and media emerged as crucial to the experience of sport in our respective contexts. Many of us have stories of being given digital technology by our interlocutors, suggesting that such technologies are now integral to many lifeworlds.¹ For some of us, the digital opens new avenues for research, while for others ethical issues come to the fore, especially when materials can be so easily reposted on social media. The digital often raises novel issues of collaboration with interlocutors, while also impacting our hopes to represent them appropriately. Across these instances, our interlocutors' own ideologies and practices around sport and the digital shape our ethnographic encounters. This is a reminder that how anthropologists use technology is not so different from those with whom we work. Yet rather than reassure us, this fact prompts

us to reflect on such uses, to examine the myriad ways technologies are taken up in everyday encounters.

Throughout this book we argue that recognising the place of ‘the digital’ is important for doing anthropology of sport in the present moment. Anthropology has a long history of engagement with sport, games, and “sport-like” practices (Dyck & Hognestad, 2015; Hildred & Crawley, 2023), but the ‘Anthropology of Sport’ is still an emergent sub-discipline. Several excellent resources have been published recently that continue to cohere the field (Besnier et al., 2018; Carter et al., 2018; Besnier et al., 2020). Comparatively, ‘the digital’ has been more widely researched, evidenced by recent readers on digital ethnography (Pink, 2021), virtual anthropology (Weber & Bookstein, 2011), and digital anthropology (Geismar & Knox, 2021), amongst others. This research builds on a longer tradition of visual anthropology in the discipline (for a history, see Grimshaw, 2001; Banks & Ruby, 2011; Pink, 2021). Although other scholars have sought to link sport and technology (Kerr, 2016), there is no comparable reader in anthropology that brings sport and ‘the digital’ together under the same volume.

Importantly, in this volume, we do not discuss ‘eSports’, a rapidly growing phenomenon that is being increasingly explored by sport studies scholars (see Hayday et al., 2022). This omission is not related to the debates about whether eSports constitute ‘sport’, nor would we ever deny the embodied aspects of these ‘virtual’ practices. Our contributors were simply united in having done work in physical ethnographic contexts where digital concerns came to the fore. More importantly, eSports merge digital worlds (Nardi, 2010) and the ‘virtually human’ (Boellstorff, 2008) in ways that fundamentally differ from the experiences of sports traditionally held ‘in-person’, and thus eSports deserves to be the focus of its own volume.

Our interest here is exploring how ethnographic approaches illuminate the role of ‘the digital’ within the everyday experiences of sports. Indeed, in many ways, the relationship between human beings and digital technologies today *is* the everyday ethnographic encounter. The proliferation of digital technologies globally has ensured that media production is now central to the everyday life of researchers and their interlocutors (Collins et al., 2017, p. 142). Whether in the form of a smartphone, laptop, or ‘wearable’, these technologies have given rise to increasingly complex ‘media ecologies’, the ever-changing and progressively interlinked understandings of media that reach across vast distances (Horst & Miller, 2012; Berry, 2017, p. 309). As these media ecologies are so integral to everyday life, it is important to recognise that any relationship with “the media-rich worlds we inhabit” (Dattatreyan & Marrero-Guillamón, 2019, p. 220) is part of the current ‘social condition’. Examining access (or lack thereof) to digital technology and the resultant power dynamics is important for understanding this social condition.

Sports make the centrality of the digital to social life extremely visible. Digital technologies have become integral to all levels of sporting activity, finding uses in adjudication, measurement, or performance review. Meanwhile, the growth of social media has changed sporting spectatorship around the world, enabling fans from disparate backgrounds to meet and share their views on sporting activities. The ability to capture audio-visual information in high fidelity and then disseminate such media means that experiences of sport and ideas about sport travel across vast distances at an increasing pace. In sum, sporting contexts present an opportunity to closely observe the role digital technologies play in social lives, and to examine the fine-grained processes that occur across a breadth of scales. However, as digital technologies are increasingly integral to sporting activities around the world – shaping how sport is experienced and understood – then one must also examine sport itself in relation to digital media ecologies. Many of the chapters in this volume convey that ideas about sport are often contested. They also describe how media ecologies promote or sustain differing kinds of contestation. When similarly deploying an idea of “sensory ecologies”, Carter et al. (2022) contend that any study of the senses must be “embedded in the contexts in which sensory information is produced” (p. 242), thereby taking account of the entangled interconnections of those senses. Hence, acknowledging that both the sport and digital media ecologies under study are contextually specific is crucial to understanding how sports are also changing in the digital age.

In this book, we illustrate the increasingly nuanced relationship between digital media ecologies and sporting practice, and examine the ramifications this has for carrying out the anthropology of sport. Though the authors have different concerns and employ differing styles, all the chapters reflect the diverse ways in which experience and understanding are (re-)constituted across sporting worlds. The book is organised around three key themes, which address the role of the digital in knowledge production, the kinds of collaborations that can be sustained in the digital age, and our hopes for appropriate representation. The authors demonstrate that while digital technologies open new modes of knowledge production, the way people consume digital media equally shapes how such knowledge is formed. Though the digital enables new modes of knowing, it can equally constrain them. Acknowledging this contradiction requires us to work collaboratively with our interlocutors, forging joint understanding that accounts for such complexity. When attempting to represent our interlocutors appropriately, we must be equally mindful of the nuanced ways such representations move and change across digital landscapes. These important ethical and methodological concerns implore the researcher to reconsider their approach to the anthropology of sport. More than anything, they reflect that to do ethnographic work today requires a keen sensitivity to the shifts in digital discourses. At their root, these themes speak to the fundamental

relationship between anthropologist and interlocutor. Indeed, the anthropology of sport in the digital age highlights how this relationship continues to change rapidly.

Knowledge

Sport in the digital age raises important epistemological questions. Audio-visual technologies have been integral to the anthropological enterprise since the early expeditions of WHR Rivers and the Cambridge School, while photographs litter Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (see Edwards, 1992; Young, 1998). Anthropologists have since developed sophisticated understandings of how to use such tools to access various elements of the human experience. The shift to digital technology has pushed this further as audio-visual tools become smaller and more readily accessible. This accessibility means that knowledge production about sport has also become increasingly democratised. The growing use of video technology in sport means our interlocutors often become increasingly comfortable expressing their embodied knowledge (Hildred, this volume). Yet the proliferation of – particularly visual – media online also shapes how this knowledge is developed by interlocutors. Furthermore, ideas about what sport is and can be now move with almost alarming speed and ever greater reach, ensuring vociferous debate without ever reaching a consensus. This poses difficulties for the ethnographer hoping to understand the experiences of sport today. The chapters in this volume reflect the kinds of epistemic struggles that occur in sporting contexts during the digital age. They illustrate that one must acknowledge how anthropologists and their interlocutors use and receive these digital technologies.

Digital technologies have ensured that anthropologists have greater resources at their disposal when researching embodied experience. Likewise, the proliferation of digital technologies suggests that understanding one's own body via technology is now a widespread phenomenon. The smaller size of recording equipment has prompted some innovative approaches to accessing tacit knowledge, including the use of cameras by researchers to 'confront' participants with their own practice (Rix, 2005; Gore et al., 2012; Hildred, this volume). Such approaches avoid the pitfalls of interviewing to understand embodied action (Downey et al., 2015), and generate insights about decision-making during bodily movement. Similarly, wearable technologies generate a wealth of data that allow new mediations of bodily understanding, thereby reshaping the embodied experience of sporting participants (Crawley, 2021b). As Neuhaus shows in her chapter, the presence of digital sensors on the body during Taekwondo competition alters what constitutes a scoring 'hit'. Consequently, participants feel hits differently at the sensorial level, and then develop new strategies of movement. Digital technologies thereby generate new modes of sensory understanding, while increasing the velocity with which embodied knowledge is formed. Thus, digital technologies can provide near-instant feedback about users' experiences during

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Contributors

Thomas F. Carter is currently an Associate Professor in Anthropology and Sport at the University of Brighton. He has been one of the leading figures in the establishment and growth of the Anthropology of Sport, having spent nearly thirty years developing the discipline through his six previous books and numerous journal articles and book chapters. He has taught in the USA, UK, and Czechia, and directs an NGO that uses sport to rebuild communities in post-conflict situations. He is currently at work on a new ethnography on how sport is used to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

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Arthur Gaillard is a Career Development Fellow in the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Durham University, UK. His research focuses on the epistemological underpinnings of the use of sport for social change in international development settings, specifically through programme evaluation. Over the last decade, Arthur has been involved with several local and international sport-for-development organisations in Peru, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and the United Kingdom.

Julia Haß is a lecturer and postdoctoral research fellow in cultural anthropology at the Institute for Latin American Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin. In her research she focuses on sport, the body, gender and power relations, urban spaces, and migration in Latin America and Europe. In her doctoral thesis, she investigated how women appropriate geographical and social spaces in amateur football in Rio de Janeiro. From 2017 to 2022, she worked on the research project "Football as a space of belonging: amateur football teams of Latin-American migrants in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo".

Sean Heath is a Social Anthropologist specializing in water, the senses, wellbeing, and the politics of bodily movement. He received his PhD in 2022 from the

University of Brighton, where he conducted research with age-group competitive swimmers in the UK, which examined the sensory aspects of immersion in water and the sociality of club swimming and how these affect youths' wellbeing. Currently, he holds a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowship at KU Leuven, studying water stewardship and the environmental politics of wellbeing in the entangled relationships between arctic waters, the senses, and place. He has also examined the emplaced entanglements between the material, social, and emotional experiences of outdoor swimming in "natural" environments in Canada, the UK, and Norway. His work has been published in the leading journals *The Senses and Society*, *Body and Society*, *HUMOR*, and the edited volume *High Performance Youth Swimming*.

Ben Hildred is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology at Durham University, UK. He has previously carried out long-term ethnographic fieldwork with the cricket community in Sri Lanka, examining the role of cricket in post-war reconciliation. Ben is now exploring the relationship between sport and social change in Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) contexts, and is beginning to examine change at a fundamental level. His other theoretical interests include knowledge production, learning, play, contingency, and rhetoric. When examining change, he deploys anti-positivist approaches, including visual, multimodal, and 'negative' anthropology. Ben founded the International Network of Sport Anthropology in 2020, and is currently a director.

Henrike Neuhaus is a postdoctoral research fellow in Anthropology and Art at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich. Their interests lie in researching Latin America, Taekwondo, knowledge transmission, care and audiovisual methods. Henrike has taught at Goldsmiths University of London, University College London and the University of Buenos Aires, on subjects including multimodal, digital and visual research methods, regional ethnography, and creative enterprise. They sat on the organising board of the University of San Martin Science Fair and Short Film Festival and was a research resident of the Erasmus+ funded project Encounters. Since then, Henrike has co-founded several working groups and collectives, inter alia INSA.

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Horse Sport" focusing on the ethnographic research on women horseback riders in Morocco.

Jasmin Seijbel works as a PhD researcher and lecturer at the Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on sports and (anti)discrimination. Her academic interests also include methodological questions around knowledge (co-)production, particularly the role of gendered dynamics in research relationships. Jasmin has published on right-wing extremism on social media and antisemitism in Dutch football fandom. She teaches global history and qualitative methods courses at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication.

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