A Study of Fair Play in the Pre-Modern Era: From the Perspective of N. Elias's Concept of Figuration*

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The purpose of this study is to clarify the characteristics of fair play in the pre-modern era, targeting pugilism in the 18th century, by focusing on the essence of gambling-oriented spectator sports. First, it analyzes the practice of gambling-oriented spectator sports from the perspective of the concept of figuration. Second, it analyzes Broughton's Rules of pugilism from the perspective of the concept of figuration to identify their function and the characteristics of fair play seen in them. Third, it examines the process by which fair play was transformed in the transition from the pre-modern to the modern era by exploring the meaning of the revision of Broughton's Rules as the London Prize Ring Rules. This study establishes the following. First, the main function of Broughton's Rules was to guarantee interesting bouts and the viability of gambling. The fair play in spectator sports conducted in accordance with these rules manifested itself in the "performance" of a bout that was fought skillfully and carefully right to the end, while being free of unnecessary accidents and injuries. Second, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, fair play in pugilism evolved under the influence of an emphasis on greater clarity. As a result, conduct that had previously been permitted came to be prohibited under the London Prize Ring Rules.

Keywords: pugilism, spectator sports, gambling, rule

1. Introduction

There has been very little research related to fair play that focuses on pre-modern sports. In particular, there has been a tendency to see early boxing as a violent, immoral activity associated with gambling, and to therefore exclude it from consideration. It is necessary, however, to re-examine fair play in the pre-modern era in the context of the actual circumstances of competitive sports in that era.

Brailsford (1985) showed that while early boxing was, because of its association with gambling, rife with immoral and dishonest activity, it also exhibited the concept of honour. At the same time, Tomozoe et al. (1987) attempted to gain an accurate picture of fair play in early boxing by looking at specific examples of judgments of fair or unfair in the 18th century. Umegaki (1996) divided the fair

play of early boxing into two components: a code of conduct originating from the sense of ethics of fighters and a code ensuring the commercial viability of gambling. Furthermore, Umegaki (2011), focusing on the interests of not only the individual fighters but all the people involved in the entertainment industry of sports, proposed the new concept of fair play required to ensure the commercial viability of gambling.

In this study, Elias's figuration theory is employed in order to further develop the above-mentioned research. Elias understood society as an interpersonal network (a figuration). He observes that, within this network, people are interdependent, order is formed independently of individual will and reason, and the order thus formed ultimately governs individuals (Elias, 2000). In previous studies on modern-era fair play, order (norms)

is understood to be formed as a result of individuals thinking and acting independently, and influencing those around them. Elias (2000), however, emphasizes the effect of interpersonal networks rather than the independence of individuals. He defines the nature of fair play from the perspective of figuration, and interprets the provision of equality in match conditions as a special technique used to maintain a balance between the excitement and release caused by the tension of sports (Elias, 1971, 1986).

Elias (1971, 1986) does not, however, address the conditions of gambling-oriented spectator sports. There has not been sufficient research that, focusing on the conditions of gambling-oriented spectator sports, analyses the characteristics and meaning of early boxing conducted as a sport in the pre-modern era from the perspective of configuration.

This study proceeds in the following way. Firstly, the actual state of gambling related to early boxing is analysed from the perspective of figuration, and an attempt is made to identify the formation process of order (norms) and the characteristics of fair play in this context. Secondly, as an example of a set of norms for early boxing, Broughton's Rules (1743) are analysed from the perspective of figuration, and an attempt is made to identify their function and the characteristics of fair play that they possess. Thirdly, the reason behind the revision of Broughton's Rules as the London Prize Ring Rules (1838; hereafter referred to as the "London rules") is investigated, and the accompanying transformation in the meaning of fair play is examined. This study thereby attempts to contribute new insights to research related to fair play.

2. The state of gambling related to early boxing and fair play

Early boxing originally took the form of a disorderly mob crowding around a fight between two amateurs. This was changed greatly in the 18th century by the champion James Figg. It is reported that, not only did he enjoy success as a fighter, but he also established an arena, the "Great Booth", in Tottenham Court Road, where he regularly held matches for the entertainment of spectators (Anonymous, 1788, p.6). After Figg's death in 1740, the shows were continued by George Taylor, and then with the appearance of Jack Broughton, they were established as a more stable business. It is

well known that Broughton, with the investment of patrons, constructed "Broughton's New Amphitheatre", and established the first codified rules of boxing, Broughton's Rules, specifically for this arena.

Examining this 18th-century boxing industry through the historical source of Egan's "Boxiana" (1812) reveals that matches where great champions fought against strong challengers were long. Chesney (1972, p.324) reports that it was unusual for matches between top fighters to be settled quickly. For example, a match between Johnson and Isaac Perrins held on 11 February 1789 went to 62 rounds and lasted one hour fifteen minutes (Egan, 1812, p.99).

Of course, not all matches lasted a long time. In a match between champion Broughton and challenger Jack Slack held in 1750, which attracted a large number of spectators, Broughton was struck between the eyes early in the match, which temporarily blinded him and caused him to lose the match in just 14 minutes. It seems that such short matches were, for spectators, unexpected and undesirable. Egan (1812, p.58) reports that the mood in the arena was one of astonishment and confusion, with screams and angry shouts, and that Broughton's patron, furious at having lost a large sum of money in the match, withdrew his patronage.

Why did matches between top fighters tend to be very long? Unlike modern boxing, there were no specific regulations concerning match duration. A new round was started when a fighter went down, and the match continued until one fighter lost the ability or the will to fight. Matches tended to consist largely of exchanges of blows, with fighters inflicting damage on each other, without evasive footwork and without gloves. Although historical sources contain descriptions of horrific injuries sustained by fighters, such as "blinded in left eye", "nose split open", and "head crushed", if a fighter really was blinded or if a fighter's head really was crushed, not only would it be impossible for the match to continue, the situation could also be life-threatening. While much is made of hard-fought matches in historical sources, it is hard to avoid surmising that there was some element of "performance", where fighters appeared to inflict more damage on each other than they really did. "What the followers of the fancy wanted were protracted exhibitions of skill, speed, bloodshed and aggressive

bravery under suffering, and its laws and conventions were admirably designed to provide them. Nine fairly won fights out of ten were decided by the loser's total exhaustion" (Chesney, 1972, p.324).

At the same time, as Brailsford (1985) has pointed out, early boxing exhibited a form of fair play based on the concept of honour. For example, the champion Broughton was described by one of his contemporaries, Godfrey (1747, pp.55-56), as being not only superior in skill, physical and emotional strength, judgment, and stamina, but also as being more suitable than anybody to the role of leader.

Gambling-oriented early boxing comprised an interpersonal network of various parties who surrounded the fighters, such as promoters, spectators, and patrons. Bouts were referred to as "prize fights"; promoters would charge spectators an entrance fee of a few shillings and the fighters would, in accordance with their ability, receive a prize of between 100 and 150 pounds (Anonymous, 1788, p.6). It is easy to imagine, then, that they would have hoped for large numbers of spectators. The spectators would have attended for a variety of reasons, such as interest in the bout itself, to support a favourite fighter, or to place a bet on the outcome, the number of downs, or some other aspect of the bout. They would have expected to enjoy the excitement of the bout and to profit through betting. These hopes and expectations entwine. For promoters, it was necessary to repeatedly plan bouts that were attractive to spectators. They therefore had to secure a large number of seasoned fighters who were able to attract spectators. In addition to nurturing fighters, promoters would sometimes headhunt fighters from the stables of other promoters.

What kind of bouts, then, would make spectators want to repeatedly attend? The appearance and victory of favoured fighters was an important element. One-sided bouts, however, in which the favoured fighter would overwhelm a fighter inferior in strength and skill would not stimulate betting or satisfy spectators. It was necessary to orchestrate bouts so that they would maintain the interest of and excite spectators and stimulate betting.

Moreover, arranging bouts between fighters who met the expectations of spectators was not sufficient. Broughton's new amphitheatre was not only larger than previous arenas; by having boxes, a pit, and a gallery around the central stage*¹, it was

designed to afford a good view of the action. If such facilities are fully utilized and bouts conducted with an awareness of how they are viewed in the eyes of spectators, excitement is enhanced and larger numbers of spectators are attracted, and consequently the income of both fighters and promoters increases, as does the stability of pugilism as a gambling-oriented spectator sport.

Furthermore, patrons formed part of the figuration. In those days, members of the aristocracy and gentry would support popular fighters. This support mainly took two forms. One was financial support. For example, Johnson received 20 pounds a year, and sometimes received an additional bonus. The other was social support of the business. In 18th-century England, forms of entertainment incorporating gambling were illegal. Pugilism events involving betting, which were illegal at the time, were condoned because people such as members of the royal family or aristocracy would protect promoters and fighters (Anonymous, 1788, p.6). The fact that Broughton was said to have had superior character and to have taken care to behave in a refined, intellectual way (Miles, 1906, p.21) possibly reflects a desire to meet the expectations of patrons and spectators.

The fighters operated within the interpersonal networks entwining such expectations and exchanges. They not only had to win bouts, but also behave during bouts in a way that would charm spectators and reflect well on their patrons.

If pugilists fought, without gloves, in an unrestrained manner from the start of a bout, there was a high probability of the outcome being decided very quickly due to some kind of accident. As bets were riding on the outcome, a good bout would have been a thrilling battle that kept spectators in a state of excitement for a long period and that saw frequent changes in advantage and an increase in stakes. Brailsford (1985, p.129) asserts that calculated bouts were needed to ensure that promoters made a profit, and that unpredictable bouts were undesirable. It follows from the above that a fighting style where the fighters exchange attacks that, while clearly visible to spectators, actually inflict relatively little, non-permanent damage would have been desirable.

Fighters, then, were demanded to realize, to the extent possible, the wishes of all participants of the figuration (i.e., fighters, promoters, spectators, and

patrons). It can be concluded that the “fair play” demanded would have been the “performance” of a bout where fighters, fighting skillfully and carefully right to the end, embodied the qualities of manliness, courage, and endurance as they “fought to the death” while avoiding unnecessary accidents and injuries.

3. The function of Broughton’s Rules and fair play

This section presents an analysis of Broughton’s Rules from the perspective of figuration, and considers the characteristics of fair play in the pre-modern era.

Broughton’s Rules consist of seven rules in total, and were established specifically for his new amphitheatre with the consent of patrons and fighters. They mainly regulate the outcome of the bout and betting. Specifically, Rule 1 concerns the conduct of a bout; Rule 2 and part of Rule 4 concern the criteria for victory; Rule 3 and part of Rule 4 concern the prohibition of intervention by parties other than the fighters or their seconds; Rule 5 concerns the division of profits; and Rule 6 concerns the rights of umpires.

The function of Rule 7, however, seems to be different. It consists of the following parts: (1) “that no person is to hit his adversary when he is down”; (2) “or seize him by the ham, the breeches, or any part below the waist”; (3) “a man on his knees to be reckoned down”. In previous studies, part (3) of this rule is considered separately. For example, Brailsford (1985, p.128) interprets “that no person is to hit his adversary when he is down” as an indication of a moral attitude.

The point of part (1) can be understood from the perspective of figuration. Elias argues that spectators who have placed bets become most excited in cases where competitors are given an equal chance of winning and it is impossible to predict who, in fact, will win (Elias, 1971, p.102), and that rules for ensuring the equality of match conditions and chances of winning were brought about by gambling (Elias, 1986, p.168). Brailsford (1985, p.131; 1988, p.8) asserts that the purpose of the codification of rules was not to promote fair play, but rather to ensure “fair gaming”. Rules, equality, and fairness in sport arose not just because of morals and ethical norms.

Morino (1985, pp.10-85; 2007, pp.30-67) proposes three functions of rules: to ensure legal stability in the form of maintenance of order, to realize justice in the form of sanctions against rule infringements, and to guarantee excitement. In terms of these functions, Broughton’s Rules 1 to 6 correspond to the ensuring of legal stability and the realization of justice. It is conceivable that the remaining function, namely, the guaranteeing of excitement, is the purpose Rule 7.

Not only did Broughton construct a new amphitheatre and make a spectator sport into a stable business, he is also credited with refining what had been nothing more than a vicious, brutal spectacle consisting of violent, chaotic bouts (Miles, 1906, p.21). Specifically, he switched to a fighting style in which fighters faced each other, stood a suitable distance apart, and used their fists to frequently exchange attacks and defences (Godfrey, 1747, p.56; Miles, 1906, p.21).

As previously argued, participants of the figuration (i.e., fighters, promoters, spectators, and patrons) demanded bouts with alternations in attack and defence, in which it was easy to see the damage inflicted, and which excited spectators and stimulated gambling. In grappling and attacks pinning an opponent to the floor, it is difficult to see the damage inflicted, and there is little scope for alternations in attack and defence. It is also impossible to create scenes depicting “manliness, courage, and endurance”. Such bouts do not excite spectators or stimulate gambling. It seems that it was necessary, then, to establish rules that encouraged a certain type of fighting style.

If we interpret Rule 7 in this way, then, we can say that parts (1) and (3) were regulations that aimed to prevent bouts continuing with fighters lying on the ground and thereby difficult for spectators to see. Regarding part (2), as it was permissible to grab an opponent above the waist and throw him, this part should be seen as a regulation prohibiting below-the-waist tackles. Although parts (1), (2), and (3) seem unrelated at first glance, they were presented together because they had the same objective.

4. The transformation of fair play

Although Broughton’s Rules were originally adopted specifically for his new amphitheatre, they

soon spread to rural areas, and became widely used (Dowling, 1841, p.30), remaining in effect for almost 100 years, until the London rules were established in 1838.

It is said that the death of “Brighton Bill” in his match against Owen Swift held on 13 March 1838 was a factor behind the establishment of the London rules (Dowling, 1841, p.62). These rules prohibited the insertion of improper spikes inside drawers (Rule 5), butting with the head (Rule 13), and tearing the flesh with the nails and biting (Rule 16). For this reason, Brailsford (1988, p.97) interprets the changes implemented in the London rules as prohibitions of dangerous conduct. It seems that as Broughton’s Rules spread to rural areas, dangerous conduct not clearly specified by the rules took place unchecked, and so it can be surmised that such conduct was clearly specified with the aim of restricting it.

In the revision of Broughton’s Rules as the London rules, however, there are points that cannot be explained as restrictions on cruelty and dangerous conduct. One was that seconds were now prohibited from bringing their fighter to the “scratch” at the start of a new round. Under Broughton’s Rules, a bout would continue as long as seconds were able to bring their men to the scratch, even if they were barely able to stand. This rule was used to prevent bouts ending quickly and simply, and to allow displays of “manliness, courage, and endurance”. Now, however, if a fighter failed to walk to the scratch unaided within eight seconds following a call to resume the bout, then that fighter was deemed to have lost (Dowling, 1841, p.64).

The other was the prohibition of the technique of deliberately going down without being hit. This was a skillfully used tactic that took advantage of parts (1) and (3) of Broughton’s Rule 7, i.e., “that no person is to hit his adversary when he is down” and “a man on his knees to be reckoned down”. Reflecting the values of modern fair play, Egan (1812) criticises this conduct as “humbugging”. From the fact that this technique was not prohibited until the establishment of the London rules, however, it would seem that, in terms of business considerations, such a tactic was indispensable. The following change was implemented with Rule 12 of the London rules of 1838:

“That it shall be ‘a fair stand-up fight,’ and if either man shall willfully throw himself down

without receiving a blow, he shall be deemed to have lost the battle; but that this rule shall not apply to a man who in a close slips down from the grasp of his opponent to avoid punishment” (Dowling, 1841, p.65).

The requirement of an upright stance is confirmed at the start of this rule and so, as with part (1) of Broughton’s Rule 7, i.e., “that no person is to hit his adversary when he is down”, it can be interpreted as an enforcement of the use of standing techniques.

These two changes, too, can be explained from the perspective of figuration as follows:

In Broughton’s time, namely, the early 18th century, pugilism was a form of entertainment through which avid fight enthusiasts (“the fancy”) would enjoy gambling. In an article about Johnson, however, who was active at the end of the 18th century, the people watching the bout are categorised into “amateurs”, “the sporting men”, “friends”, and “spectators” (Egan, 1812, pp.90-102). Through Broughton’s innovations, such as the construction of a large amphitheatre, which allowed easy viewing, and measures encouraging the use of standing techniques, bouts came to attract people who had never before set foot inside an amphitheatre. As a result, pugilism became a form of mass entertainment that attracted huge crowds of spectators. Of course, this change cannot be separated from the changes that occurred in British society from the 18th to the early 19th centuries, namely, the increase in urban population and the development of transportation systems brought about by the advance of the industrial revolution.

Furthermore, this change in the spectator base influenced the fighters and promoters in the figuration. As a new way of further exciting spectators, promoters started planning bouts with a clearer axis of conflict, such as the bouts between the black American fighter Tom Molineaux and the English champion Tom Cribb. Their 1810 and 1811 bouts saw what has been described as the greatest level of excitement ever seen in the history of pugilism. It is recorded that 20,000 spectators were present at the 1811 bout (Egan, 1812, pp.401-413). These bouts greatly excited spectators and were a great commercial success. At the same time, however, this kind of bout changed the form of enjoyment into a clear but simple one where spectators experienced excitement and pleasure by witnessing a favoured fighter

pummelling his opponent.

Summarising the above discussion, we can interpret the meaning of revising Broughton's Rules as the London rules not only as an attempt to restrict cruelty and dangerous conduct. Broughton's innovations brought about changes in the spectator base and in the form of bouts. Previously used tactics came to be perceived by spectators as difficult-to-understand, exaggerated, ponderous performances. It is probably no coincidence that the London rules were established at a time when the modern ideal of fair play was spreading. The spread of modern fair play was driven, on the basis of evangelism, by the middle class that emerged through the advancement of the industrial revolution. The fair play that emerged in the pre-modern era within a figuration connecting people who engaged with sport in the pursuit of pleasure and profit changed into a new form together with changes in that figuration.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the characteristics of fair play in the pre-modern era together with changes in its meaning were examined in the context of pugilism, which became popular in England in the 18th century, from the perspective of figuration.

As a result, the following points were established.

First, the main function of Broughton's Rules was to ensure the viability of gambling and guarantee interesting bouts. Fair play manifested itself in the "performance" of a bout that, fought skillfully and carefully right to the end, embodied the qualities of "manliness, courage, and endurance" while being free of unnecessary accidents and injuries.

Second, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, as the figuration connecting the people involved in gambling-oriented spectator sports changed, fair play in pugilism evolved under the influence of an emphasis on greater clarity. As a result, forms of "performance" that had previously been permitted came to be prohibited under the London rules. In this way, standards used for judging the fairness and desirability of conduct fluctuated in accordance with changes in figurations.

In the future, further research is needed to fully understand the process of transformation into the modern ideal of fair play.

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Notes

*1: Fig. 1 shows the bout between Broughton and Slack that took place at Broughton's amphitheatre. It shows the stage in the foreground, boxes for higher social classes in the top left, a pit surrounding the stage, and a gallery in front of the stage. There are also standing spectators at the back.

Fig. 1 Broughton's new amphitheatre

Source: Lynch, B. (1925). The prize ring. Illustrated by reproduction of old prints, several oil paintings, and of the famous Byron Screen. London: Country Life. Plate XXXII.

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