

Teaching stones in sport history

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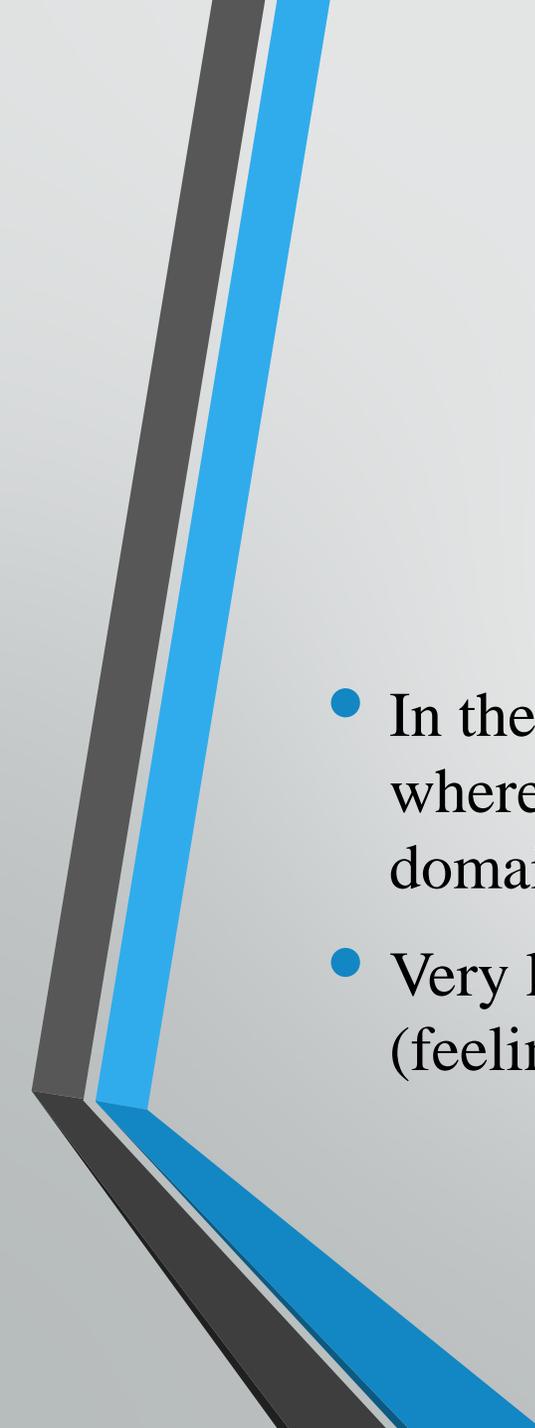
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REVIEW QUESTION

- Use the Canadian Benchmarking Project to create a historical narrative on the theme: “Sport and the Stone Age period”

Introductory remarks

- Sport history as a subject discipline uses the term, “sport” relative to all physical activities of humankind (Van der Merwe, 1999:xi).
- Play is survival mechanism in ancient times....Dutch philosopher, Johan Huizinga, claimed that play is a cultural activity (Huizinga, 1933:5).
- It is arguable then that the human race evolved culturally because in part, the ability to adapt to our surrounding was facilitated by the playful characteristic manifest in human nature (Estes & Mechikoff, 2002:23).
- This knowledge is useful for students of sport history who generally display an antagonism towards the discipline and often demonstrate a general dislike in studying ancient civilizations (Hart, 1976: V-1).

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- In the classroom setting, this lack of interest may be ascribed to situations where students of sport history are usually only stimulated in the cognitive domain of learning.
 - Very little attention is usually given to the stimulation of the affective (feeling) and physcomotor (movement) domains.

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- Overcoming this lack of interest may be by: **providing context for existing narratives** on Stone Age sport history and to **help students create new narratives** where others get voices (Booth, 2005:202).

1) providing context for existing narratives on Stone Age sport (Stellenbosch)

- A way of describing context for narratives on Stone Age Sport is to recover a sport history of Stellenbosch that those in positions of power (past and present) removed from public discourse.
- General works of this nature include the publications, *Stellenbosch Drie Eeue (Stellenbosch Three Centuries)* and *Stellenbosch, 1679* (Smuts, 1979:51; Stellenbosch, 1929:135). Both works honed in on human occupation of Stellenbosch from 1679 onwards and ignores any previous history. Also ignores sport practices.
- *Nog altyd hier gewees* (Was always here), makes references to the ancient Bushmen and Khoi people in only eight lines (Giliomee, 2007:1).
- There is a need for new narratives to interrupt this trend and place Stone Age sport historical accounts within a community and global context.
- The practice of studying the cultural life of ancient societies through narrow nationalistic lenses has run its course. There is need for an extension of the work done by Floris van der Merwe, who explored sport practices of stone age people (Van der Merwe, 1999: 1-8; Van der Merwe, 2007:1-4).
- In order to convert these texts into sport history teaching and learning material, the Canadian Benchmarks of Historical Thinking (CBHT) framework can be utilised.

2. Creating new narratives on Stone Age sport

- Historical narratives should relate complexities and lesser known legacies of the distant past with modern day entanglements.
- By expanding six concepts of historical thinking as outlined in *The Canadian Benchmarks of Historical Thinking* (CBHT), students can **identify a ‘good story’**. The CBHT categorised Historical Thinking into six concepts: (a) historical significance, (b) evidence, (c) continuity and change, (d) cause and consequence, (e) historical perspectives, and (f) moral dimension (Peck & Seixas, 2008:1017, 1024). A “good story” is a narrative created with connections between facts that turn incoherent chronicles into meaningful discourses (Hammarlund, 2012:119).
- All history teaching however needs a story and therefore it is necessary to construct a sport historical narrative.



Stones and ‘sport’

- The term, [Stone Age](#), was coined in the late 19th century CE by the Danish scholar Christian J. Thomsen, who came up with a framework for the study of the human past, known as the Three Age System.
- Problem (1) = The basis of this framework is technological since it revolves around the notion of three successive periods or ages: Stone Age, [Bronze Age](#), and [Iron Age](#), each age being technologically more complex than the one before it.
- Problem (2) = This Three Age System has little meaning when applied outside [Europe](#).
- Problem (3) = It formed a basis for anthropologists to conclude that sport development took place on levels from simple practices in the early stages of human development through to the last stage where features such as elaborate playing fields and equipment, professionalism, spectator sport and class distinctions between organisations determine participation (Bressan & Van der Merwe, 1992: 10-11). The implications of this developmental model is that modern sport, with all its controversies surrounding bribery, drug abuse and excessive violence, is more advanced than “primitive” pastimes.
- Problem (4) = Concept of stones being the first sport implements in human history has not been left unchallenged by historians. The archaeologist, Åke Svahn also postulated that the branch of a tree and not a stone was man’s first weapon (Van der Merwe, 2007:1). An inherent limitation of the Stone-Bronze and Iron Age continuum is the idea that these were levels of progression.

Stones and ‘sport’

- Despite these criticisms, this system is still largely used today and, although it has limitations, it can be helpful as long as we remember that it is a simplified framework.
- John Goodwin and ‘Peter’ van Riet Lowe divided the Stone Age into three main stages in 1929:
 - The **Earlier Stone Age** in Southern Africa dates from about 1.8 million years ago to about 250 000 years.
 - The **Middle Stone Age** dates from about 250 000 to about 25 000 years ago.
 - The **Later Stone Age** dates from about 25 000 years ago to within the last few hundred years of human existence (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007:13).

Stones and 'sport'

- Although not easily recognisable by modern day students, these periods hold opportunity for creating sport historical narratives. Contemporary sport practices reflect certain positive assumptions made by historians regarding the Stone Age period. Stone Age people hunted for food as individuals but also found it effective to form groups and hunt as a team. Perhaps the individual that stood out as the best hunter was admired by those around him for his skill and bravery. It might also be that the activities that served to make one a better hunter were in all probability playful activities that emulated hunting. Over time, the desire to survive, to compete for honour and to claim victory has become a part of culture and is symbolized in many ways through games and sport (Estes & Mechikoff, 2002: 23-24).

Stone Age periods as ancient Stellenbosch sport culture

- According to Louis Péringuey, an archaeologist, there was human activity in the present Stellenbosch area, about 250 000 years ago during the Earlier Stone Age period. Péringuey's finds were made at a site, today called Bosman's Crossing, named after the railway station situated nearby. The site was located at:

the foot of a steep hill called *Pappegaaiberg* (Parrot mountain) where a small rivulet - a tributary of the Eerste River, runs. The spur of the hill abuts on that rivulet and is intersected on one side by a cart road and by a railway cutting on the other. The space thus left has been used for a good many years as a brick field ... the great accumulation of this brick clay is in itself a proof of great antiquity (Seddon, 1966:133).



Problems of ancient sport heritage sites

- The place where Louis Péringuey drew his conclusions was declared a provincial heritage site with a stone monument (Mountain, 2003:12). However, Simon Haw, a retired history subject advisor, asserts that “most monuments and statues tend to blend into the background and are seldom even noticed much less interrogated by the citizenry busily going about their daily rounds” (Haw, 2010:163). It has also not found a place in the social consciousness of the surrounding communities that happens to be poor. About three kilometres south is a sprawling informal settlement, Khayalitsha and about the same distance north is another, Khayamandi.
- Historians claim that many human movement activities at Bosman’s Crossing were similar to those practiced elsewhere in the world. Hand-axes found in India, the Thames Valley in England and in Stellenbosch are almost identical (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007:14). The place where Péringuey found stone tools is commemorated in a small archaeological reserve and is a provincial heritage site (Mountain, 2003:12). By 1965 this “brick clay’ was gone and the grass of the Archaeological Reserve, which laid in a triangle between two roads and the Plankenberg River was level with the Main road that ran over the Adam Tas bridge into Stellenbosch (Seddon, 1966:133-134). This site has been vandalised and the plates to commemorate this finding has been removed. Today there is, due to human activity, very little, of the original flora in the valleys and districts of the Early Stone Age period (De Vos, 1979: 27). This makes it difficult to identify what kind of branches were used for weapons if researchers use Svahn’s theory.

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Problems of ancient sport heritage sites



Stone Age Sport in wider western cape and southern africa

- Although no archaeological finds exist in the present day Stellenbosch about the Middle Stone Age (MSA) period, evidence of human existence was found on a farm, Elandsfontein near Hopefield in 1953, 120 kilometres North-West of the present town. This unearthing showed similarities with archaeological findings made in 1921 in Kabwe, Zambia (Tobias, 1986:22). Findings were also made at Fishoek, some 50 kilometres south-west of Stellenbosch (Tobias, 1986:15). Therefore generalisations about human movement (sport) activity in Stellenbosch can be made with some certainty. The possibility of other modern day sports having similarities in Stone Age human activities practiced elsewhere in the world could also be evident in the Stellenbosch Stone Age period.

Canadian Benchmarking Historical Project

Historical significance

- This aspect refers to historical data that results in change (the event had deep consequences, for many people, over a long period of time) and is revealing (the event sheds light on enduring or emerging issues in history and contemporary life or was important at some stage in history within the collective memory of groups). Significant topics might meet either of these criteria but not necessarily both (Peck & Seixas, 2008:1027).

Evidence

- This aspect refers to the use of a wide range of evidence that include archival material, academic literature, books, memory recollection, newspapers and visual material. The framers of the Canadian Benchmarks of Historical Thinking Project emphasized the importance of being selective when using evidence (Seixas, nd).

Continuity and change

- This aspect of historical thinking seeks answers for the question: “What has changed and what has remained over time”? (Seixas, nd).

Cause and consequence

- The concept of cause and consequence helps historians understand how and why certain conditions and actions led to others (Seixas, nd).

Historical perspectives

- The Canadian Benchmarks of Historical Thinking Project explains the developing of historical perspectives as understanding the “past as a foreign country” with different social, cultural, intellectual and emotional contexts that shaped people’s lives and actions