

LEISURE

1896

First women's intercollegiate basketball game, University of California–Berkeley versus Stanford University.

1925

Leica introduces a handheld camera that revolutionizes sports photography.

1972

Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act amended to prohibit sex discrimination in schools and collegiate athletic programs that receive federal funding.

THE SPORTS SHOW

Sports are a part of everyday life and culture. Millions of people of all ages play and watch sports, from Little League baseball and cross-country skiing to the Olympics and professional games. Fans, governments, and businesses invest billions of dollars in sports. Sports are the subject of a seemingly infinite number of images in newspapers and magazines and on Web sites and televisions. They are glorified as heroic and demonized as intellectually regressive. They are part of personal and collective memory, marking moments in life, time, and even history.

“The Sports Show” explores how sports became a way of life through the power of images, beginning in the 19th century with the development of organized sports and the invention of photography. As seen in this gallery, sports began as leisure activities photographed by participants and photojournalists. Audiences of the time experienced sports as live cultural events tied to education, local communities, and personal leisure.

Today audiences experience sports primarily through images broadcast on a mass media network. Spotlighting some of the most compelling images from the past hundred and fifty years, “The Sports Show” reveals how dramatic images transformed age-old leisure activities into mass spectacles. These images do more than just show sports: sports stars become pop culture icons; politics and race become part of the games; and millions of people are placed at the center of the athletic action.

CIRCULATION

1895

*William Randolph Hearst creates
the first newspaper sports section,
in the New York Journal.*

1954

*Launching of Sports Illustrated, a weekly
publication dedicated to sports.*

2002

*NBA finalizes a \$4.6 billion contract with
television networks ESPN, ABC, and TNT.*

Sports images are circulated seemingly everywhere through a media network that has its roots in the late 19th century and continues growing today. Whether moving or still, they occupy a variety of formats, from black-and-white and color photographs to movies and streaming video. Since the 1890s sports images have filled dedicated sports sections in the world's newspapers, reaching a mass audience and becoming a powerful part of daily life and experience. As the captions affixed to the backs of newspaper photographs in this gallery illustrate, such pictures are also republished in new contexts, with new audiences.

Since the 1930s, picture stories on sports and sports stars have been published in magazines such as *Look* (1937–1971), *Life* (1883–), and *Sports Illustrated* (1954–). The 1970s saw televised sports being broadcast in prime time, a development that has produced immense profits for networks, professional teams, and players. Today, sports images animate millions of cell-phone screens and Facebook pages, feeding a world populace whose appetite for sports of all types seems insatiable. In 2011, an average of 111 million people watched the Green Bay Packers beat the Pittsburgh Steelers in the NFL Super Bowl.

RACE

1908

Jack Johnson becomes the first African American world heavyweight champion, defeating Canadian Tommy Burns.

1968

Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their fists in a Black Power salute during the Olympic medal ceremony, resulting in their suspension from the U.S. team and expulsion from the Olympic Village.

1971

Basketball player Lew Alcindor changes his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Debates and questions about race in culture are revealed in striking ways throughout the history of sports and sports images. In the United States, minority populations achieved equal treatment on the sports field long before gaining equal rights off the field. In the early 20th century, boxing and the Olympics provided some of the first opportunities for African Americans and other minorities to compete with whites. Professional baseball, basketball, and football followed in the mid-1940s. In an odd contradiction, American sports fans often overlooked race to support an athlete competing against a political rival or enemy. The images in this gallery highlight racial debates in culture.

POLITICS

1936

American athlete Jessie Owens takes four gold medals at the Games of the XI Olympiad, held in Berlin.

1966

England defeats West Germany's soccer team 4-2 in the FIFA World Cup final in front of 98,000 fans at Wembley Stadium. And 400 million fans watch on television.

1980

"Miracle on Ice": Team USA defeats the Soviet hockey team 4-3, going on to win the gold medal at the XIII Olympic Winter Games.

Politics have permeated the history of sports, often interrupting the "games." Sometimes sporting events—particularly the Olympic Games—have provided a stage for political conflict, as when Hitler's Nazi regime hosted the Olympics in Berlin in 1936, and when the Middle East crisis became a reality to world audiences during the 1972 games in Munich. Powerful images documenting moments of crisis often introduce mass audiences to unfolding political conflicts for the first time. From Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda images of 1936 to Jim McKay's announcement from Munich that Palestinian terrorists had kidnapped and killed eleven Israeli athletes, the works in this gallery highlight such key moments.

ICONS

1920

Babe Ruth is sold by the Boston Red Sox to the New York Yankees for \$100,000 to finance a Broadway play produced by Sox owner Harry Frazee.

1984

Michael Jordan is picked third in the NBA draft.

2008

Swimmer Michael Phelps wins eight gold medals in Beijing, the record for most medals at a single Olympics.

Since photography's beginnings, star players have had their pictures taken, and by the 1860s their images were being used to advertise products. The reproduction and distribution of photographic images made local and regional athletes into national stars with whom audiences could identify. The growth of broadcast media after the 1960s transformed athletes from stars into larger-than-life icons. With the spread of television, millions watched sports in their living rooms, and charismatic athletes like Muhammad Ali became international pop icons. Today, networks and athletes often collaborate on exclusive media coverage, with keen attention to the athlete's image as a popular and saleable commodity. This feeds audiences' desire to be "up close and personal" with players.

SPECTACLE

1921

First live radio broadcast of a sporting event, on Westinghouse station KDKA in Pittsburgh: a prizefight between Johnny Dundee and Johnny Ray.

1970

ABC airs Monday Night Football and revolutionizes sports broadcasting with instant replays and slow motion.

2011

Super Bowl XLV, pitting the Pittsburgh Steelers against the Green Bay Packers, averaged 111 million viewers, making it the most-viewed American television broadcast.

Sports today are a spectacle in which media help shape the experience and meaning of games. Even audiences attending live games can watch huge electronic screens that simultaneously televise the action, provide audio commentary, and offer replays. Music and entertainment complement the action or fill in for every moment of inactivity on the field. And players can be seen looking up at screens with live action to help them evade or outrun opponents.

Today's spectacular sports culture promotes participation on various levels, from organized teams to weekend warriors to online gamers to professional athletes. The growth of professional sports and media has contributed to a new relationship between fans and players. Fans are now participant-observers. In the past, sports stadiums were filled with fans, mostly men, wearing business suits and stylish hats. Today men and women, families and friends, attend games, watch on television, or go to work dressed as their favorite players. We are now in a culture where everyone can be a player.