

ARE WE POOR SPORTS?

"New Zealand Is A Nation Of Lookers-On"

IF there is time these days between all the proclamations, annexations, declarations, and violations of a war-time world, it is a good chance to take stock of what has been happening to sport and of what is happening to it.

Sport is not without significance in time of war, and its special significance is that as much of it as survives becomes what it should be all the time: sport.

In New Zealand we are beginning to be a nation of very poor sports.

By that it is not meant that we fail to applaud the other side, or to take our losses well.

Most of us are fairly decent people, with whom a love of what we call "good clean sport" is traditional enough to become automatic, quite apart from the virtues of the business. We slip occasionally when we are in a crowd, as this page pointed out last week apropos of wrestling. There are moments when tradition gives way to love of what might be called "good dirty sport." Who has not heard a crowd yelling to a football team to "put the boot in?" And who has not seen the team responding?

So We Sat Back

Even so, these are hearty enough sentiments, and in these times it pays to be hearty.

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But all that does not mean that we are a nation of sportsmen. We are beginning to be a nation of lookers-on. It is time we snapped out of it. The sooner we do it the better.

For example, between 1920 and 1930, Rugby in New Zealand reached a pitch of excellence never before exceeded, and never afterwards approached.

This was fine. Everybody said so. And it was fine. So fine, in fact, that the whole country sat back every week-end to see this marvel in the flesh.

"We have worn our pants too thin."—Says THID this week

Inevitably, they sat back too long, and you can see the result on any field any Saturday these days.

Gladiatorial Contests

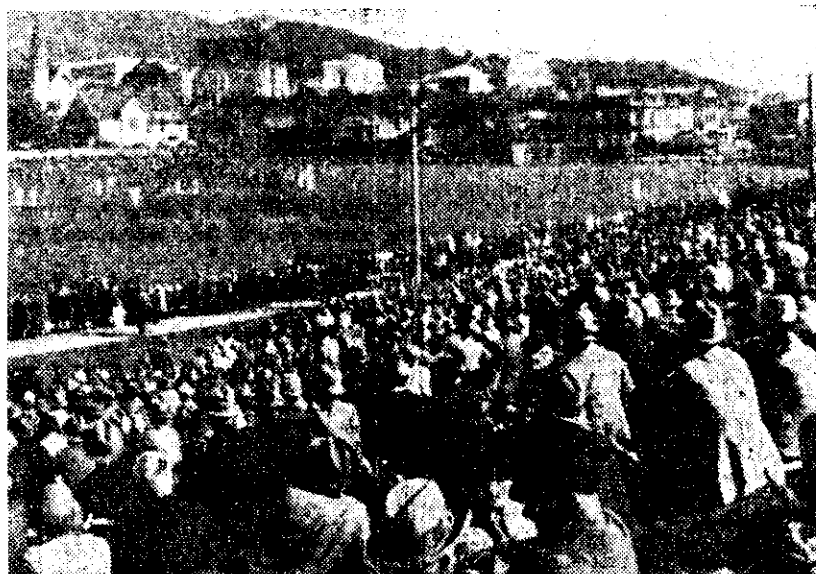
They did the same thing in Rome, although we have not yet reached the stage of importing the peoples of conquered nations to give us our vicarious thrills with battles to the death in the arena.

But we have been approaching that stage. Sport has become the game of the few, the livelihood of the many, and the preoccupation of the multitude.

Sometimes it is the players who lower the flag; but not often. Mostly it is the spectator who does to all sports sooner or later, what he does to wrestling. It is his part to sit by and shout, and that is all he is good for.

Nothing But a Spectacle

Well-intentioned as the players on a football field may be, when 30 men can persuade 30,000 to sit on their hind ends and exercise nothing but their vocal chords and their swallows, the game degenerates into a spectacle, and might just as well be played on a Hollywood set, filmed and screened in the picture theatres. This, in fact, would give the boys and girls of the generation a chance to see it, for that is where they go on Saturday afternoons to see their sunshine photographed on fashionable beaches, their bows and arrows transformed into sub-machine guns, their Red Indians into gangsters, and to breathe their fresh air through the inadequate ventilators of modern Coliseums.



NEW ZEALAND "ON THE BANK"

The players are still not paid. Ninety per cent of them are still good sportsmen and good amateurs. But the spirit of the new Homo Flatulens is there, if not the fact.

The spectators put it there, with their thousands of shillings and half-crowns every week, and the controlling authorities keep it there with their huge gates and their huge grandstands.

Radio Encourages It

Rugby is not such a good example of the process as Racing. Who goes to watch the horses run? A great number of people do like to see good horseflesh in action; but what crowds would go to a meeting at which there was no tote, no bar on the grounds, no bookmakers on the other end of the telephone?

Radio, it must be admitted, encourages us not to play ourselves. From the field itself we graduated easily enough to the bank and the stand. From the bank and the stand it has been a simple transition to the fireside at home, with the set full on, and mother asking what's the difference between a five-eighth and an inside back.

Sport in this country has been a business, a very serious business, and a very bad business for the C3 supporters who pay to keep it going.

There is no evidence to show that any of the democracies manage to do any better. There is plenty of evidence to show that many of them do a lot worse. In America, university colleges maintain their football teams as a strictly business proposition. Boxing is a racket managed and controlled for the express and thinly-disguised purpose of rooking as many dollar-heavy Americans as the promoters possibly can. Why else is a tiger like

Louis matched against goats like most of his latest opponents?

In England, war-time exigencies wakened the Postal services to the time and service they were giving to amuse the British Working Man—who once initiated, fed, and supplied the material for an Empire—with sweepstakes on the week-end sport.

Soft From Sitting Down

We are all soft from sitting down, soft everywhere but where we sit.

Knobbly and bent as they often are, legs were meant for holding us off the ground. If they are only good for getting us to the car or the train or the tram that runs to the park where better men use their vigour to better purpose, then we are just balloons built around a rattling skeleton. Bloody Adolf has found some of the balloons of Europe easy to prick. It is time we showed him that Country Lads are good for more than wearing out their pants.

"Impossible" Jumps

ELABORATING the note on a 15-foot pole vault (in our issue of June 7), D. Howe, Auckland, writes to list a number of high-jumpers who are getting close to the "mythical" seven-foot jump. He gives Albritton, 6ft. 9 3/4 in.; Johnston, 6ft. 9 3/4 in.; Burke, 6ft. 9 3/4 in.; Marty, 6ft. 9 1/8 in.; Walker, 6ft. 8 5/8 in.; Steer, 6ft. 8 1/8 in.; and Walker's supposed jump of 6ft. 10 3/8 in. Our thanks to this correspondent for helping to keep the record straight. All the same, although these figures talk big, in high jumping six-ten is a long way further from seven feet than it is from six feet.

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