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SPORT AND WAR IN ENGLAND: Then And Now

Some Discoveries By "Mass-Observation"

BOOK is the last place in sportsman, or at least the traditional idea

of a sportsman, would expect to find interesting material. Sometimes there is an interesting book about sport, apart from potboilers by Frank Smythe, or the annual publications of the Everest Committee; but these are scarce, and the sportsman usually looks for his specialised reading material on newsprint. But there arrived in The Listener office last week a tardy copy of a sociological study, and inside its red covers sportsmen will find, if they care to look, a startlingly apt illustration of a subject discussed on this page in the issue of July 12.

The book is "Britain," and it's by "Mass-Observation," that half-hobby, half-career of two young men who have enlisted a whole host of observers to assist them in organised sociological spying.

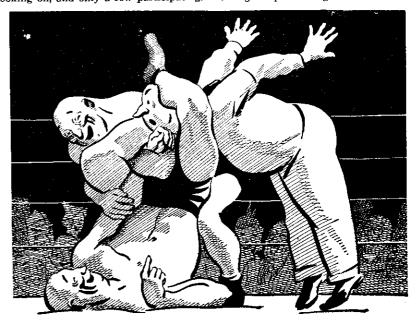
Going to the People

They wanted to know what people which the were doing and what they were thinking and saying. They could not find out from the newspapers, so they went around the towns and country listening to people, watching people, and asking people questions.

The result is interesting, although not generally conclusive. However, it is decidedly conclusive in its section about sports in England then, and it bears out exactly the theory advanced here two weeks ago: that the modern tendency to make sport an affair of big houses and big money turns it in actual fact from sport into business, with 90 per cent, of the population of a modern State looking on, and only a few participating.

One took down a description of the first bout:

P secured a full Nelson on B and pushed him well over the ropes. B managed to get free, returned to hold on P but was crashed to the canvas heavily by P with flying mare; there was very little excitement in this round except when B had a leg scissor on P's head, crossing his legs and pressing him between them. P was shouting in agony, gong saved him. Second round P opened this round in a most unexpected manner, without waiting for the gong, he rushed to B's corner, grabbed him by the hair and kneed him fiercely three times in quick succession in the lower part of the groin, B screamed in agony, doubles up holding his pelvis. P grabs him and lifts



".... The Observers concentrated on All-In Wrestling for their first survey"

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All-In Wrestling

In New Zealand we saw the process developing mainly around Rugby and racing. We have seen New Zealand

crowds massed bank on bank to see

their favourites fight out the game or

the race. And we have wondered, those

of us who have stopped to think, whether

the modern tendency to organise every-thing on the big scale of specialisation

was not creating communities of people whose main task in life was perverted

into that of sitting and watching-out-

side the busy minority.

In this book there is an elaborately careful survey of the process as it was going on in England before war came to startle them, as it has startled us, out of our enervating complacency.

Disregarding for the moment Association football, whippet racing, the football pools, and the Irish Sweep, the Observers concentrated on All-In Wrestling for their survey,

B over head. Jack the referee springs on P's back, pulling his head backwards tearing at his hair, but has no success, and over the ropes and into the ringside seats goes B; there is another big scuffle by the ringside spectators for Jack the referee is thrown over too --- P runs round the ring beating chest-meanwhile the din is terrific-crowds shouting -dirty rat, swine, lousy pig, then missiles hurtle through the air, lighted cigarettes, a key, a piece of billiards chalk and Observer had to dodge a small iron boit thrown at B from the other side of the ring; P won't let either B or referee back into the ring, spectators shaking their fists at him. The hall is in an uproar, B manages to get back, but P seizes him by the head-and forces him on to the ropes, gouges his eyes, then knees him again, B drops on the canvas close to Observer; he is a pitiable object, shouting he has hurt me. Bell goes but

(Continued on next page)





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