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ARTICLE



Bodies in Motion: An Epilogue

William W. Kelly

Department of Anthropology, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA

The bodies in motion in this special set of articles are those of athletes in stadiums, ballet dancers on stage, and chefs in restaurant kitchens. The articles are first concerned with how such bodies are molded through strenuous and structured training to achieve expert and elite levels of performance and competition. Deploying such concepts as assemblage, situated learning, *kata* ('patterned form', as per Christensen), and contagion, they demonstrate just how contingent the shaping of elite performance is upon the specific material and institutional nexus through which a body moves and within which it must coordinate and compete with other bodies. At the same time, these sports and arts are all enmeshed in wider fields of discourse and transnational flows of actors that can instigate consequential ethno-nationalist codings and other claims about the training regimes. The second major concern of the articles, then, is to reveal the variable circumstances by which such codings are either reinforced or diluted by transnational mobilities.

Reflecting on these papers recalled an ethnographic moment of my own in how bodies can be trained for elite performance. A number of years ago, while doing fieldwork with professional baseball teams in Kansai, I had the opportunity to spend a few days with a stable of sumo wrestlers. It was in March, the month that the second of the six annual two-week national sumo tournaments is held in Osaka. The 800 or so wrestlers who make up the professional sumo world in Japan are organized into about 50 stables that combine dormitory and a training facility as a small closed sports space run by the stable master (an ex-wrestler) and his wife and a stable coach. These Tokyo-based stables decamp to Osaka for the month of March, and a wealthy supporter had built a version of the home facilities in a working-class neighborhood in southeast Osaka for one of the larger stables.

The 25 wrestlers in this stable were arranged in a strict hierarchy of age and accomplishment, and the youngest novices began their daily training (*keiko*) in the dirt practice ring at 5 a.m. More senior wrestlers came in at half-hour intervals, and by 7 a.m. the most senior wrestler, Musashimaru, who then held the highest rank of Grand Champion, had arrived. After warm-ups with his fellow stablemates, he spent about 30 minutes moving in and out of the ring, sparring with the more junior wrestlers, who had to drive him back and forth across the ring (*butsukari-geiko*), often being thrown to the hard-packed floor. The stable coach sat on a slightly elevated platform to the side, barking occasional criticisms and grunting a few suggestions, but the training and the learning primarily took place through the perpetual motion of bodies doing the three traditional exercises in between practice bouts with one another within the marked ring in various intensities of combat.

However, what struck me most about those early morning sessions took place at the side of the ring. Musashimaru was constantly attended to by several of the youngest wrestlers whose thin bodies were dwarfed by his massive and muscular girth. Every time he stepped back from the fray, the apprentices on either side would wipe him of sweat and dirt, repeatedly moving their *tenugui* hand towels over the arms and shoulders and down the trunk and legs of the Grand Champion. I realized that what was unfolding in those moments was a powerful tacit training. Morning after morning, to stand beside a champion and quite literally move your hands over the textured topography of his body imparted a most visceral and tactile lesson in just what an elite sumo body was and what would be required of them as they exercised – and ate – their way towards greatness. The daily choreography of the practice ring and the brusque didacticism of the coach were training essentials, but seeing, smelling, and touching one's way around a champion's body was surely an equally critical element. These were bodies moving in sumo skinship, not unlike the analyses in this special issue. Cooks, dancers, and athletes are literally cheek by jowl, on and off stage, and it is this multi-sensory proximity – Edwards uses a notion of contagion to capture this – that inculcates prowess.

The other feature of those morning practices that is germane to these articles was that the champion wrestler, Musashimaru, was himself a foreigner. Born in American Samoa, he came to Japan and joined the stable at the age of 18 and rose through the ranks, absorbing the same tough and sometimes abusive indoctrination as his fellow Japanese stablemates. In 10 years he earned promotion to Grand Champion, becoming only the second foreigner to attain that rank.

It may surprise some readers that Japan's most hidebound 'national' sport should tolerate a foreign champion, but other readers will know that the world of sumo at its upper levels has been dominated by foreign wrestlers for well over 20 years. There is much grumbling and some outright nationalist talk among Sumo Association officials and some media commentators, to be sure, but it is actually quite remarkable how these foreign bodies have been incorporated into sumo, held to the same dictates, the same standards, the same rewards.

Compare this to the sport of baseball, as we see in Paul Christensen's article. Baseball has been played in Japan since the 1870s, and at both the schoolboy and professional levels it was the nation's most popular sport through the twentieth century. It is also the most studied sport, but these studies have been generally of prominent professional teams and powerful high school teams.¹ The importance of Christensen's article is that he looks at the sport from its periphery, examining the precarious conditions of baseball in a small independent league of teams that exist on the precipice of profit, buying players of uncertain worth and showcasing them in regional venues. Their slim hope for survival rests on their ability to attract enough fans (in a region without a major-league team) and to make some money in commission in the rare case that a major-league team signs one of their players. The margin of error on both sides – owners and players – is razor thin. In part to attract fans and in part to augment the thin pool of potential domestic recruits to such risky work, the teams sign foreign players to term contracts. Like their Japanese teammates, these are players on the edge, looking for a chance they might not get at home,

¹See Whiting, *You Gotta Have Wa*; Kelly, *The Sportsworld of the Hanshin Tigers*; and Shimizu, *Kōshien yakyū no arukeoraji*.

perhaps recovering from injuries, and happy for the larger salary than that offered by the minor leagues in the US.

Under conditions where everyone is precarious, it is not surprising that Christensen finds an appeal to a Japanese baseball body is a useful token in adjusting to this workplace, in fighting for recognition, and in justifying the decisions about playing time and contracts. Playing with one's (corporeal) body and playing as a (social) body entails enduring long practices with all-out effort, overtly expressing team commitment (staying to clean up the field and dugout), and demonstrating deference to coaching instructions and manager commands. Of course, team sports everywhere profess that practice makes perfect and even more practice makes even more perfect bodies, that winning requires teamwork, and that training must be closely managed by coaches. What is happening here is that such differences in degrees of emphasis are turned instrumentally into nationalized binaries, and the Dominican players, the Japanese-American pitcher, the Brazilian pitcher, and others Christensen interviewed on and off the field are caught up in and spat out of this ideological spin cycle.

Christensen rightly points to one major culprit in this nationalized baseball stereotyping, and that is the notion of *kata*, or proper form. Embodying *kata* is the proper way of playing, the proper way of practicing, the proper way of being on the team. To be sure, most sports emphasize learning and demonstrating a set of 'fundamentals', but *kata* are more specific frames of body *hexis* – an enforced consensus that there is one right way to throw a ball, to swing a bat, to field a grounder, and so on. Playing by *kata* is the way to fit in (for players) and the way to assert authority for the coaches and managers (e.g., 'do it as I say, because what I say has the weight of precedent and the authority of convention'). Because this notion of *kata* is rooted in the past, it can become a nationalizing stereotype; the better baseball players are those who have been molded since youth by the correct *kata*.

This is a crucial point because it suggests why foreign athletes are treated differently in sumo and baseball. All sumo bodies are forged within sumo; domestic and foreign teenagers are recruited into the stables and put through the same harsh regime. Baseball players, by contrast, come molded by their home baseball training, and this may account for the exceptional handling of foreign players at the highest levels of the pros (who are provided translators, luxury housing, special travel) and at the very precarious level of the independent league here (where three young foreign players must share two bicycles).

Greg de St. Maurice enters another tight world of exacting standards and well-trained bodies, that of *kaiseki-ryōri* chefs and their staff members, who work in those few traditional Kyoto restaurants that continue to specialize in this multi-course haute cuisine. A *kaiseki* dinner is a visual and gustatory feast, whose ingredients are rigorously selected by seasonal and aesthetic criteria and meticulously prepared and presented. Each of the restaurants subscribes to a general *kaiseki* code but also has distinctive recipes, ingredient sources, and styles and standards of preparation that are practiced by a kitchen staff as hierarchical in skill, prestige, and experience as any sumo stable. But where athletes are performing their craft in public before the audience, in cooking, the *kaiseki* chefs are backstage, in the kitchen, and there is a spatiotemporal distance between what their bodies bring forth and the experience of the customers when the finished ensemble is placed before them.

What is quite fascinating to me about his article is its location among the elite restaurants of Kyoto (*ryôtei*) at a moment in which the broader rubric of 'traditional' Japanese cuisine is being branded as *washoku* and canonized as a UNESCO-designated Intangible Cultural Heritage. One might think that this national embalming would actually erect higher ethno-nationalist walls around the kitchens from which *washoku* is emerging as a globally recognized cuisine. But de St. Maurice's article reveals the opposite, at least for some of Kyoto's most cuisine-codified restaurants, which are opening their kitchens to foreign trainees and even potential regular employees.

Equally surprising are the accommodations the *ryôtei* are making for their changing workforce. In baseball and sumo, bodies must be molded to the spaces and their routines. In *kaiseki* restaurants, it is the kitchens that are being reworked. Everything from countertops to flooring material is being altered to accommodate the changing bodies of the new staff (who are taller and heavier); new equipment, techniques, and even training pedagogies are being introduced that reorganize physical demands on the body, daily routines, chef skill sets, and kitchen work relations. The result, de St. Maurice shows, is more rather than less flexibility in who the chefs are and how they train and deploy their bodies.

Elise Edwards' article takes us from the stop-and-go interval sport of baseball to the flow sport of soccer and across the gender divide to an elite female pursuit. Although parity in recognition and resources for female sports is distressingly a long way off in Japan, the women's national teams in both soccer and softball (their version of baseball) have been much more successful than their male counterparts in Olympic and World Cup competitions. Indeed, female athletes in many sports such as marathon, judo, volleyball, ice-skating, tennis, and curling have been as or more successful than their male counterparts at Olympic levels.²

Soccer is significantly different from baseball in that it entered Japan without a distinctive national 'taste', a hegemonic center. Despite its parochial modern origins in late-nineteenth-century Britain, soccer spread quickly through imperial circuits and to the European continent; by the early twentieth century, there were multiple centers of elite play in several world regions. It is true that there is pervasive talk among athletes, managers, scholars, etc. about playing styles in soccer that points to body types, mental dispositions, and team tactics, and this discourse uses a lexicon of attributes like speed, strength, stamina, skill technique, and strategy. And it is true that such styles are sometimes tied to putative national characters (thus, coaches and commentators will sometimes refer to a 'Brazilian style' or an 'Italian style' or a 'German style' of play). But the fairly constant movements of players and coaches around the multiple leagues and the constant double schedule of playing for a club team and playing for one's national team have greatly de-nationalized and decentralized this grammar of style.

We can see this in Edwards' insightful analysis of elite Japanese female players. In the absence of the salaries and opportunities accorded male professionals, female players nonetheless achieve high levels of performance through determined training and a constant search for playing challenges. European and African elite teenagers are recruited to US university teams through post-Title IX fellowship support,³ while post-university players from the US and Japan often seek chances on various European and Japanese corporate

²See Kietlinski, *Japanese Women and Sport*; and Kelly, 'Adversity, Acceptance, and Accomplishment'.

³See Brake, *Getting in the Game*.

teams and professional leagues. Edwards shows how the inflow of European players into the nascent Japanese league in the 1990s to augment rosters has been overtaken by an outflow of the best Japanese players for fresh challenges in the European leagues.

Edwards deploys the concept of contagion from classical sociological theory to express what these elite Japanese women are seeking when they go abroad. Contagion is a kind of sympathetic magic of absorbing powers through proximate association, and I think this precisely captures what many of these players want. Soccer demands a portfolio of body tools but it is a flow sport, all action and few stoppages. The players are almost always better skilled than their coaches, and beyond basic conditioning and static drills, getting into the rhythm of the game is the most effective discipline of learning as well as competing. Tempo, timing, positioning, and other orientations of one's soccer body are best refined in tandem and in testing with other bodies on the field. The Japanese players don't seek (and don't need) static pedagogies; rather, they want to experience the rhythms of the European game.

I think, too, Edwards is correct in expressing this in terms of an active, situated learning, which is a paradigm given rigor by anthropologists like Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger and shown by many other anthropologists as central to becoming expert in workshops and artisanal settings across Japan.⁴ This is not just learning by doing but learning by simultaneously being and watching and doing in a place of expert production and performance. That is the disposition of these soccer players, and it may well be what aspiring chefs seek in coming from abroad to the Kyoto *kaiseki* kitchens as well.

Contagion and situated learning may also characterize the movement that Nicholas Sternsdorff-Cisterna analyzes in the world of professional ballet. It is refreshing to see ballet considered in the same forum as sports because people often underestimate the parallels. Ballet demands the same intensely rigorous training (someone once quipped that 'if ballet wasn't so hard, they'd call it football!') and the same fierce competitive drive to succeed. The dancer is on stage in a ballet corps, a ballet social body that must move as one, but, along with opera, ballet is also the world that gave us the figure of the prima donna.

Ballet dance training has a long history in modern Japan, but like Edwards' soccer players, those who aspire to the most elite levels frequently gain acceptance and spend peripatetic years in European and American companies. Classical ballet is like Western classical music, jazz, salsa, and hip-hop, which is to say they are all complex artistic practices with strong claims of particular sensibilities and with specific historical, place, and class origins. They have all given rise to an exclusionary rhetoric of authentic performance and policed boundaries. However, one of Sternsdorff-Cisterna's surprising findings is that these mobile Japanese ballerinas are seldom under scrutiny these days for inferior 'Oriental' bodies and ballet capacities. I suspect there are at least two reasons for this, judging from his fascinating research. One is the 'oddity' of any ballet body. No one is born with a body potential for ballet. Even Euro-American dancers must work against their bodies as they grow and train; a properly shaped and performing ballet body is as rare as the body of a National Football League lineman or a sumo wrestler. Indeed, bodies of any elite physical

⁴See Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*. For examples of anthropological applications of this concept in Japan, see Singleton's edited volume *Learning in Likely Places*; Bar-On Cohen, 'Kime and the Moving Body'; Kohn, 'Creatively Sculpting the Self through the Discipline of Martial Arts Training'; and Moore, *The Joy of Noh*.

performers are freaks of nature, and of culture. It is possible, as we see in baseball, that the *kata* claims can be exclusionary, but ballet seems to have overcome its specific national origins to become a rather internally mobile, if relentlessly physio-meritocratic world.

Velodrome cycle racing (*keirin*) is one of Japan's four gambling sports, and Eric Cunningham's article is most welcome in giving serious attention to this neglected counterpart to studies of conventional major sports. Along with powerboat racing, horseracing, and 'autorace' (motorcycle racing), these are so-called *kōei kyōgi*, or public sports, because they are directly administered by public entities as gambling operations yielding profits to municipalities and other non-profit entities. They are thus shaped by the perpetual tension between the hyper-competition of speed sports and the need to demonstrate enough transparency and equity to attract a gambling public. All four gambling sports have several consequential features in common. First, they are sports in which a human must operate a vehicle of conveyance (a horse, boat, bike, or motorcycle) and negotiate it around a circumscribed elliptical course. The human body thus must accommodate itself to the device. In a sense, the body is an extension of the device, rather than the more common situation of the sporting body employing material objects like skis and skates and rackets as *its* extension. The light and lithe jockey perches precariously on a half-ton thoroughbred race horse, while the *keirin* bike racer spreads his massive tree-trunk like thighs over the tiny seat, piston-like driving the thin tires of a featherweight frame.

Furthermore, all four are individual sports that nonetheless require some cooperation (or collusion, really) among the riders during a race. A *keirin* rider races for himself but not by himself. Temporary, tactical alliances are struck, sometimes in advance, sometimes in the moment, in the intense jockeying for position in the first few laps before the bell strikes for the free-for-all that is the final lap and a half. Racing among a half dozen riders on a steeply banked track with short straightaways and sharp curves, one must be constantly angling and accelerating one's body/bike machine in search of the final temporal and spatial edge.

Cunningham insightfully demonstrates just how this *keirin* body – solid, powerful, compact – is tightly regulated by an assemblage of material forces, institutional structures, and normative strictures. These include the rigidly standardized specifications of the bicycles themselves and the restrictive frame of the short track race itself, the controlled licensing and school credentialing of all racers, the surveillance of the racers' movements throughout the meets, the strict enforcement of race rules by multiple referees with complete sanction powers, and more. All of this is deemed necessary to insure a reliable flow of punter revenues. He finds assemblage theory to be particularly germane because *keirin* so precariously presents itself as gambling and as sport.

This tension is especially manifest in those who watch rather than those who perform. The multiple races that compose a day of *keirin* are performed for gamblers of the sport, not for fans at the match of a team (while the riders are known and statistically ranked, they seldom rise to individual popularity, and few gamblers risk their money just because they like or support a particular rider). This separates *keirin* from conventional sports that may nonetheless have some gambling on the margins. Gamblers come to win, and seek to determine which racer will accomplish that for them. Fans come to support their team, whom they fervently hope will win but whom they will continue to support nonetheless.

Unlike baseball games and soccer matches, *keirin* races are structured (through the assemblage that Cunningham reveals) not to display an ethic of fair play but to demonstrate the grounds for fair betting. The foregrounding of gambling in *keirin* may be responsible for another of its features. *Keirin* is a distinctively Japanese version of velodrome cycle racing, and one might expect that this might inspire some nationalizing talk. In fact, neither *keirin* nor its sibling gambling sports are touted for their 'Japanese-ness', which may be due to their decidedly proletarian image and overt gambling associations.

Taken together, these five articles demonstrate that bodies in sports and the arts are shaped towards expert and elite performance less through isolated training and more through their positioning within material and institutional matrixes and in close alignment with other bodies. Individual talent, effort, and ambition may be prerequisite for reaching success in these fields, but achievement and expertise are forged over time in the crucible of highly stipulated and contingent social practice. The articles offer a number of suggestive conceptual tools for the analysis of such body fashioning within these structures of coordination and competition.

Where the cases most diverge is in the relative importance of articulating ethno-nationalist prescriptions of proper body discipline and evaluations of ideal body dispositions and performance. Christensen's baseball case stands out as the most overtly nationalizing, in which it is not the game itself but those who play it who are marked by ethnically or nationally specific qualities of body, mind, and spirit. In contrast, the indigenous worlds of *keirin* and *kaiseki* may be marked as 'Japanese', but they have generated surprisingly little exclusionary talk about the Japanese-ness of the bodies that win races and produce artistic cuisine. *Keirin* has few non-Japanese racers but that is probably because opportunities are limited, the life is harsh, and the riders' careers are short and largely anonymous. Kyoto *ryōtei* restaurants are proving surprisingly open in taking in foreign staff for short-term training or regular apprenticeship. Sumo too fits this model. Elements of this ineffably 'Japanese' form of wrestling include notions of a unique diet (gorging on the *chanko-nabe* meal), center of gravity for the body (power from the haunches), high tolerance of senior-junior hazing, and a distinctive comportment of dignity (*hinkaku*), and yet foreigners are admitted and given the opportunity to measure up to these standards.

Perhaps we can understand these differences if we distinguish between national, international, and global scales of these sports and arts. *Keirin*, *kaiseki*, and sumo are nationally framed; they have affinities to forms of cycling, haute cuisine and wrestling elsewhere, but they are recognized as distinctively Japanese assemblages of body training and elite performance, to follow Cunningham's line of analysis. That is, they are Japanese not because of the bodies that are recruited in their world but because of the trained bodies that emerge from the assemblages.

Soccer and ballet, in contrast, are now global fields of elite performance, by which I mean not just the scale of where they are to be found but the fact that both are marked by multiple centers of elite performance, arrayed in shifting hierarchies with increasingly standardized measures of the differences among them. There are stronger national soccer leagues and more accomplished ballet companies, but the hierarchies are not stable and the movement of elite talent among them is such that it is increasingly difficult to sustain plausible notions of fixed national styles and ethno-racial stereotypes. (This does not deny the sometimes virulent racism, for instance, in the treatment of

African soccer players in the European leagues, but that is an expression of a structural racism of the society and not justified in soccer terms.)

In between the national and the global is the international, exemplified by the case of baseball. The distinction from the global is subtle but crucial. Baseball may be an Olympic sport, played on all five continents, but it is still dominated by the hegemonic power of Major League Baseball (MLB), the organization of owners of the US professional league.⁵ There is now a World Baseball Classic modeled on the FIFA soccer World Cup (in which the American team actually doesn't perform well), but, despite the name, it is operated by MLB (and its Players Association) to MLB's financial benefit and logistical priorities. There may be a Little League World Series, but it too has been absorbed into MLB governance and financial control. Baseball is an international network, and players (and capital) move among the national leagues (especially the Caribbean leagues, Japan, South Korea, and the US). However, it is an uneven playing field, tilted from all directions towards the fixed center of the MLB. Japanese baseball, Cuban baseball, Dominican Republic baseball, and the few other places where it is the national pastime continue to define (and defend) themselves against the MLB, and Christensen provides clear corroboration that putative national differences survive in marking even the most daily interactions.

Bodies in motion, articles in tandem. Each of these articles is an insightful ethnographic analysis of distinctive body fashioning in a very particular (and particularly demanding) structured setting. Together, they give the reader a highly stimulating comparative array of the rigors of this fashioning and of the variable force of framing talk about these settings and those who move within them.

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