

Addiction & the Humanities, Vol. 6(11) - 'Tis the season for winter sports and spirits

December 29, 2010

Earlier this month, there were an unusual number of arrests during the National Football League's New England Patriots versus New York Jets game in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Foxboro and State Police arrested 117 people, compared to 75 arrests during last year's matchup; approximately 83-87% of the arrests reportedly involved public intoxication (Kent 2010; Naughton 2010). This week's *Addiction & the Humanities* discusses the apparent association between cold weather sports and alcohol-related arrests.

Disorderly intoxication is not limited to professional football events. This problem extends to collegiate football and other sports. For instance, a study at the University of Florida reported an average of 70.3 (SD = 35.4) arrests during days with home football games compared to 12.3 (SD = 8.8) arrests during control days (i.e., Saturdays without home football games) (Merlo, Hong et al. 2010). These findings are suggestive but not definitive; it is possible that more arrests occur on home game days because inebriated students might be easier to find aggregated within a stadium than distributed across many dorm rooms. Similarly, a recent Montreal Canadiens' win against the Pittsburgh Penguins hockey game was followed by 41 arrests. It is unclear how many of these arrests were alcohol-related, but one newspaper reported that people were joyous and drunk, with at least six people being arrested before 11pm for public intoxication (Solyom 2010). [Click here](#) for photographs from the riots that ensued. Those photos show some people holding beer cans (or what appear to be beer cans). [Click here](#) for photographs of others robbing a liquor store. More damaging riots also occurred in Montreal during 2008 after another Canadiens win. Pierre-Paul Pichette of the Montreal police speculated, at the time, that small groups trigger the violence and others follow suit because of the alcohol they have consumed (Hamilton 2008).

Arrests during warm and cold weather sports

Cold weather might play a role in sports-related drinking behavior. Compared to

football, baseball, which primarily takes place during warmer weather, appears to have significantly fewer alcohol-related arrests. Fox News reporters researched baseball fan arrests in or near Cellular Field and Wrigley Field at Chicago from 2005 to 2008; there were 80 and 63 arrests respectively, although they did not specifically report how many of these arrests were alcohol-related (Zoso 2009). If we assume alcohol was involved in all of the baseball arrests, more people were arrested for public intoxication at one football event (i.e., 2010 Patriots vs. Jets at Foxboro) compared to four years of baseball at Cellular and Wrigley Fields. However, the relationship between sports and season is confounded, making this comparison difficult to interpret. Football is a violent contact sport and baseball is a non-contact sport; this characteristic likely is a factor in attracting more disorderly behavior.

Nevertheless, people often speculate that cold weather contributes to alcohol consumption because people falsely believe that hard liquor will warm them up. For instance, Foxboro Police Chief Edward O'Leary suggested that people probably were severely intoxicated because, rather than drinking beer, a typical beverage of choice while tailgating, people were drinking beverages with a higher alcohol content (Police found a large number of empty peppermint Schnapps bottles around Gillette Stadium following the game) (2010; Kent 2010; Naughton 2010).

What can we conclude?

Although anecdotal stories seem to suggest that cold weather might play a role in alcohol-related arrests at sports events, ultimately this remains an empirical question. Cross-sport comparisons confound sport, violence, and season; therefore, it is impossible to say with certainty whether a particular sport or a particular season contribute to causing disorderly behavior. However, there is evidence (e.g., literature showing that violent sports stimulate disorderly conduct and violence among fans (Young 2000)). Further, to establish some evidence that will clarify whether temperature is associated with disorderly behavior and alcohol consumption across sports, researchers could compare football and baseball events that were played at the same temperature. To assess the causal relationship between temperature and disorderly conduct among fans, researchers would need to randomize fans to conditions (e.g., sporting events at particular times of year), and then examine their subsequent drinking behavior.

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