



Article

STIHL Timbersports[®] and the Reconceptualization of Modern Sport in the Light of Decontextualization and Eventification of Forestry Work

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Abstract: This article examines STIHL Timbersports[®] and its amalgamation of craftsmanship, competition, eventification and branding, through the lens of decontextualization of sport. It thus revisits and revitalizes the concept of sportification, as well as discusses the characteristics of sport such as authenticity and “uncertainty of outcome”. The aim of the article is to grasp the different processes that challenge our common positions regarding sport, which may in turn progress sport beyond the prevalent conceptualization of modern sport.

Keywords: sportification; work and play; Timbersports; technologization; indoorization; Got Talent; virtual reality



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1. Introduction

In *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga ([1939] 2004) argues that sport originates from play, but that the play element appears to get lost in modern sport due to a mounting seriousness in the wake of increasing rationalization and professionalization as well as various commercialization processes. Play, Huizinga argues, is a nonutilitarian activity performed for its own sake; it serves no other purpose than play itself. Consequently, the emergence of modern sport—with its focus on achievement, specialization, rationalization and standardization—has meant that the lightheartedness of play was lost. Play turned serious, with the organization and regulation of hitherto spontaneous games occurring at the expense of joy and spontaneity. Though Huizinga's work is no longer new, his thesis is still considered a crucial argument.

Huizinga's acclaimed thesis regarding sport's genesis is generally supported, for instance by Norbert Elias' figurative analysis of the civilization processes and the extended regulation of sport (Elias and Dunning 1986), as well as by Allen Guttman's Weberian analysis of the sportification process in modern sport (Guttman 2004). Although Guttman emphasizes rituals more than play, he uses a Weberian typology to describe the gradual process whereby a physical activity goes from a primitive stage to a modern sportified activity (Guttman 2004). Guttman presents seven criteria in this sportification process, with fairness/equality, standardization, quantification and records as the basic driving forces.

Guttman, like Huizinga, has had a great influence on sports history research, as many researchers have continued to use his typology, often in a revised form to analyse when and how specific sports, countries or cities have reached a modern stage of sport (e.g., Goksøyr 1991; Yttergren 1996; von der Lippe 2001; Pfister 2007). Most likely, a current revision of Guttman's conceptualizations will consider trends such as the increasing “eventification” of sport as well as the devaluation of records as the result of a quest for more spectacle (a “ballyhoo”).

While these foundational ideas are compelling at their core, there are sports that have developed in a different and reverse manner than from play or ritual to sport. Rodeo, for instance, originates from the professional skills and livelihood of cowboys, as an additional opportunity to present their talents in the forms of amusement and competition. The competition forms in modern pentathlon builds on military forms and capabilities. Fencing seems to have historical roots in chivalric games and training for war, yet it is also presented in medieval carnivals and exhibition games, although in a rather brutal fashion. Today we can also observe sports that have generated from fictional origins, such as Quidditch, created in the successful *Harry Potter* novels. Still, following the logic of sportification, there are also new or altered sports that have originated internally, for instance competitions in rowing machines, which previously served as training equipment.

In this article, we focus on sports that originated in craftsmanship and forestry work. In relation to sport, many (Swedish) athletes have worked in the forestry industry and thus have natural training as a basic support to their success in various competitions and championships (cf., [Svensson 2017](#); [Sörilin 1995](#); [Svensson and Sörilin 2019](#)). However, forest machines have increasingly supported and even replaced natural craftsmanship in the forest industry due to increasing rationalization and technological advances. In comparison to the period of 1920–1960, in more recent decades heavy work with chainsaws on the ground has been superseded by advanced forestry trucks and wagons ([Hjelm 1991](#)).

Despite this change, the craft and craftsmanship have turned up in a different setting, albeit in an altered manner: in the form of Timbersports. This development foregrounds our rationale in the reasoning and aim of this analysis. Thus, our approach will broaden the field of sport studies and its analysis of the sportification process in modern and post-modern society.

Still, an initial question arises concerning the probability of including tree felling, tree splitting and woodcutting in the common conceptualization of sport, in comparison with, e.g., weightlifting or speedway. There are, however, substantial reasons for such an assessment. For instance, Timbersports is a production of STIHL, labelled and branded as STIHL Timbersports®, and is explicitly launched as a sport event and has progressed and matured, becoming increasingly “sportified” as depicted in [Guttmann’s \(2004\)](#) concept of modern sport. In addition, Timbersports is characterized by physical activity.

Notwithstanding these characteristics, there might be objections in light of the traditional concept of sport. Sport has regularly been regarded as a leisure activity, produced in an “imaginary setting” ([Elias and Dunning 1986](#)), regardless of sport’s commercial and professional progress. By contrast, woodcutting, as a profession, is regarded as a serious part of our social life, albeit the mundane practice in the spring at the holiday cottage, which is more related to leisure.

However, through the progress of Timbersports, a real social activity (a work/profession) gradually transformed into a sport—or a sport event—which, in turn, has generated professional timber athletes, trained and coached to compete, not to work. Thus, STIHL Timbersports® challenges our familiar concept of sport and offers a clear and analytical focus on social processes in sport such as decontextualization and eventification. In this respect, STIHL Timbersports® appears, as an enigmatic sport, to blend the characteristics of modern sport with the tendencies and predictions of future sports ([Carlsson and Jönsson 2010](#); [Jonasson 2014](#)).

2. Aim and Methods

By focusing on STIHL Timbersports®, this study aims:

- (1) to analyse professional skills’ transition from work to sport, as well as the legacy of when craftsmanship is replaced by sports talent, as seems to happen in STIHL Timbersports®
- (2) to focus on the effects of the sportification process and to comprehend the processes of decontextualization and eventification of sport, with a special focus on the progress of STIHL Timbersports®

Accordingly, the article examines STIHL Timbersports® and its amalgamation of craftsmanship, competition, eventification and branding, through the lens of decontextualization of sport. It thus revisits and revitalizes the concept of sportification and discusses the characteristics of sport such as authenticity and “uncertainty of outcome” (cf., [Loland 2002](#)). The aim of the article is to grasp the different social processes that challenge our common positions regarding sport, which may in turn progress sport beyond the prevalent conceptualization of modern sport.

The study was based on a mixed methods approach involving three types of data collection. First, we made observations of the company’s Swedish website and Facebook account. Second, we made observations of videos and competitions (STIHL Timbersports® Four Nations Cup and the STIHL Timbersports® Virtual European Championship) on social media (Facebook and YouTube). The collected data were analysed using an inductive content analysis with a focus on (1) how the company visually (in pictures and videos) and textually presented the sport and (2) the innovations the company has developed by introducing the sport in new media contexts on television and online.

Third, we relied heavily on two semi-structured interviews with Ferry Svan, a celebrated Timbersports athlete in Sweden. The interview guide was structured based on three themes: (1) talents, motivations and general experiences; (2) his participation in ‘Got Talent’ on Swedish television; and (3) his participation in the digital championship of the 2020 STIHL Timbersports® on 27 December 2020. The choice of informant was based on Ferry Svan being the most well-known practitioner of Timbersports in Sweden. He is not only one of Sweden’s leading Timbersports athletes, with gold medals in the Junior World Championships and Nordic Championships, but he is also the son of Gunde Svan, who was a famous and celebrated cross-country skier (a traditional “modern sport”) and a supreme model of a rational modern athlete, with multiple gold medals in the Olympics and World Championships ([Ehn 1989](#)). In this respect, Ferry Svan was raised in the culture of modern sport. He shared that, as a child, he used to compete in everything, even everyday tasks: “everything has been competition in my upbringing [...] my dad has taken time” (TV4/Talang [Got Talent], 15 January 2021).

3. The Progress and the Marketing of STIHL Timbersports®

The forest and garden machine company STIHL launched STIHL Timbersports® due to the firm’s reputation as a strong chainsaw brand.¹ STIHL Timbersports® is an international competition series in extreme sports that started in 1985 in the United States and came to Europe in 2001. The sport’s roots are found in 19th-century Australia and New Zealand, when lumberjacks competed against each other by chopping and sawing wooden blocks. Today’s forms of competition have become more technological, with advanced equipment, but they have also considerable elements of more naturalistic—and authentic—tools. Still, the “equipmentification” is palpable and contributes greatly to the sport’s nerve, frenzy and attraction as a motorsport and as a physical strength sport.

STIHL Timbersports® consists of six forms of contests: three with axe (Underhand Chop, Standing Block Chop and Springboard), two with chainsaw and one with a two-meter hand saw (Single Buck). The motorized races are Stock Saw, which is performed with one of STIHL’s stronger standard chainsaws, and Hot Saw, which is performed with a custom-built chainsaw of 62 horsepower.

All competitions simulate felling a tree or cutting an already felled tree and have a historical origin in how trees were felled and cut in the past. But the equipment is adapted to the sport, due to the sportification process. The contestants are marketed with the fact that they possess strength, endurance and technology—as well as courage. For example, Hot Saw is described thus:

“The goal is to cut off three panels from the 46 cm thick and horizontally mounted wooden block as quickly as possible. [...] The challenge in this branch is to control the powerful chainsaw that has 60–80 horsepower. With speeds of around

250 km/h and weight of close to 30 kg, these machines require the absolute best of the athletes".²

In a similar manner, Underhand Chop is presented via cool and powerful videos,³ giving the impression of attractive, speedy and muscular entertainment, with an exalted 'show quality', though still within the logic and form of sport.

There are competitions for individual athletes as well as for national teams. There is, for instance, the Team World Cup, with over 100 athletes from more than 20 countries (where STIHL has local offices). In these competitions, four athletes compete with each national team, where the fastest times advance further in the championship. The two teams that win all rounds make it to the final and battle for the world title in the Team World Cup. There is also the World Championships, in which the world's top 12 athletes compete in six different contests for the prestigious world title. After each event, the athletes with the lowest score are eliminated, following a sports logic. The sport:

"[r]equires mental strength, perfect technique and perseverance. Contestants need to use all their reserves and give everything they have in each round. A 100% stake is required in each duel. The slightest mistake can lead to being knocked out" (<https://stihltimbersports.se>, accessed on 1 October 2021).

Yet, the pursuit of records—an important criterion in Guttman's analysis of modern sport—seems to be less important, and the entertainment—the event—has become increasingly the focus, as in Formula One[®]. While this does not mean that there is no world record, the record is not essential for the progress of the sport, compared to the show and the instant excitement at the arena during specific events.

At the same time, the commercial link of STIHL Timbersports[®] is quite clear and natural, in comparison with the naming of national football leagues by a bank or brewery, or with a football team become associated with a cosmetics company or energy drink producer. STIHL's connection to Timbersports is, in this respect, much more natural, and the mutual influence seems obvious. The sport's strong connection to STIHL means that other chainsaw brands are not used or officially permitted in competitions. If any of the athletes happen to choose a different machine, the company brand would have to be pasted over and hidden. This limit does not affect Hot Saw, where the huge and impressive chainsaw is provided by STIHL, and all competitors must use the same machine due to its price and, following the sportification process, out of fairness.

Of course, STIHL tries to create attraction around the sport and, by extension, the company's tools and equipment, as well as perhaps an image of the organization's culture. The presentation of the sport thus has elements of a dramatic show and of the spectacular, something of a "rock concert" (cf., below). At the same time, there is an impression that the sport is extremely serious and that the athletes are very fit and technically skilled athletes truly competing against other athletes, much like the regular modern sport as presented in Guttman's conceptualization.

Yet, STIHL Timbersports[®] could also be regarded, and thus conceptualized, as a travelling theatre group or as an activity like the Harlem Globetrotters, presenting an extravagant exhibition. However, in comparison, the crucial sport logic—such as competition and the uncertainty of outcome—is taken seriously in STIHL Timbersports[®]. The event is more comparable to Formula One[®] than to skills in rodeo, though it is less directed and staged than, say, Ultimate Fighting or Formula One[®], with their assigned hierarchies within the stables and among the contestants.

In conclusion, what we have observed is a decontextualization of skills in the wake of a sportification of a profession, although there remains a certain contextual resemblance and logical connection between STIHL as a company and STIHL Timbersports[®] as an event and regular modern sport.

3.1. An Athlete's Perspective and Experiences

Ferry Svan trains and competes full-time, but he also has broad experience in forestry through his training and work as a forest machine operator. However, he has not had any

particular benefit from his Timbersports skills when engaging in practical forestry. He states, “If you are going to split firewood at home, it is absolutely an advantage, but all forestry today is run with chainsaws and forestry machines, so the axe is no longer in the profession. But it is always good to have a good physique, to be able to fell trees and to work manually with chainsaws”.

Timbersports can to some extent be likened to a representation of traditional forest work as it was once practiced, before the time of the large forest machines. But such an image is simultaneously simplified, because as a modern sport, the logic of competition in Timbersports’ various contests has changed the practice into something completely different from the forest work that it was originally meant to emulate.

Timbersports is not about a professional skills competition, as Ferry Svan emphasizes: “I would say that it is like any other sport, even if it is in close relation to old forestry. Today it has developed into an athlete sport, where the axe is part of several forms of competitions”. Being world champion in Timbersports is therefore not comparable to being the best forest worker in the world.

Thus, STIHL Timbersports® strives to “sportify”—i.e., standardize—the contests as far as possible, to create fair competitions. Ferry Svan discusses this problem at length:

“At competition, all timber is turned so that it is completely round and equal for everyone. After all, one tree doesn’t have to be like the other in hardness when you chop or saw. You compete on each wooden block that are two consecutive pieces out of the same tree, they are ‘brothers’ you could say. It’s as always as you can get it. We chop a lot in aspen in Sweden. Out in the world, you compete on the woods that there is a lot of and that it is easy to get hold of. If you have a spruce that is twiggy, the axes and saws are too sharp and thin and easily break. At competitions down in Europe there is not so much aspen, but then you often run with poplar [. . .]. At larger competitions, the material is equivalent, but as in any sport, the conditions can be changed, different years. It’s fun to break a record, but then you must be in a lot of competitions. Wood is wood, it’s living material. In some competitions it is a bit harder, on others it is softer”.

In addition to the sport’s environmental impact (i.e., the consumption of timber and petrol) and the idea of sustainable sport, the problem that ‘wood is wood [...] and a living material’ has led to the creation of special “Timbersports forests” in Belgium and the Netherlands,⁴ due to the sportification process (and still, the timber must be transported to the global events!).

The sport is developed under STIHL’s supervision and dominance. Thus, being attached to a specific brand is a distinctive feature of STIHL Timbersports®, in comparison to other (motor) sports (Formula One®, for instance, consists of several car brands advertising their racing cars). It would be difficult and complicated to compete on a chainsaw from a different brand. Ferry Svan comments on this aspect of the sport:

“Since STIHL is the one holding the event, it is their products that apply. Then it is not possible to advertise on stage for a competitor to STIHL. But really, the chainsaw (STIHL Stock Saw) is the only STIHL product that we use. The competition organizer is responsible for this, and you do not have to bring your own to the competition. In Hot Saw, it’s a completely different setup. You can trim your engine as much as you want. You’re supposed to wear it yourself and it’s supposed to be one cylinder, that’s the rules. It’s a lot freer [but difficult to use another product than STIHL, our remark]. These are specially built, and where you get to buy an engine, trim it up, put on a chain and sword and little else”.

Even when competing in prestigious competitions such as the Swedish, Nordic, European and World Championships, show competitions are the most common forms of competition in which Ferry Svan participates. The atmosphere in the ‘shows’ is therefore elevated and animated, which he describes thus:

“Since everything happens on stage with sound and light, there’s a bit of a rock concert over it, I have to say! When you come out to world competitions with several thousand in the audience, it becomes a completely different thing! Something happens to the audience all the time, it’s action and everything happens on stage. It’s not like a marathon where you see the runners for a few minutes in the stadium. It’s speedy, fun and entertaining!”

That it is “speedy, fun and entertaining” and “a little rock concert” is in line with the “eventification of sport” (and popular culture at large), in which STIHL Timbersports® seems to ride or even accelerate a general trend, thus increasing sport’s role in the entertainment industry.

3.2. *Got Talent’ and Virtual Championships as New Platforms for Sport*

This section further emphasizes the decontextualization of sport in relation not only to place but also to time. In addition, we will focus on sport as a produced—manufactured—form of entertainment, and as a part of the progress of popular culture.

(A) Interestingly, Ferry Svan showcased his skills on the TV show “Talang” (Got Talent),⁵ competing against several musicians, a dance group, a stand-up comedian and a group of girl gymnasts. Notably, Ferry Svan did not apply for the show himself. In fact, he was contacted by the production team, who asked if he was interested in participating, most likely because of his well-known sporting ancestry and the spectacle of the yet unknown sport he practiced. Actually, there is a trend in which popular culture hacks the logic of sport, with programs like Masterchef and Robinson (cf., [Carlsson and Svensson 2015](#)).

In the TV-show, Ferry Svan is initially given the following introduction: “Unlike dad Gunde, 59, it wasn’t the ski tracks that attracted him. It is Timbersports, professional lumberjack with chainsaw, sharp axes and saws with huge saw blades on time, which applies”. The challenge he promises to complete is a mix of three elements in STIHL Timbersports®, which includes the chainsaw, the long saw and the razor-sharp axe, in an interval of 80 s. An even bigger challenge, however, was to get the equipment in place in the studio. Ferry Svan states:

“It was difficult to transport all the equipment and get it fixed on the stage floor. Since the floor was made of glass, we had to be very careful, and we were not allowed to use bolts. Normally you want the scaffolding to be completely still, no matter how hard you hit the log. We had to solve it with large heavy weights and other special solutions. It actually went well!”

The judges cannot believe their eyes when Ferry Svan suddenly swings a razor-sharp axe, woodchips flying before their eyes as he saws a thick tree trunk with a strong and noisy chainsaw. As he stands on a log to cut it off between his feet, one of the judges becomes terrified, hides her eyes and screams: “Stop it, stop it! What’s going on? Well, God, well God, help me, I panic, stop, stop, stop!” (cf., [Ek 2021](#)).

This is, consequently, excellent entertainment! Ferry manages to complete the challenge in 70 s. This is good television, and the atmosphere is excited and cheerful. After Ferry’s successful performance, one of the judges admits, “I’ve never panicked like that. You came so close to chopping off your feet. I loved you and hated you at the same time. You’re going to get so many girls after this” (cf., [Ek 2021](#)). Ferry laughs a little at the jury’s strong reaction: “it looks much worse than it is, according to those who practice the sport. But “there are certainly not that many centimetres to the feet [...] a few centimetres in boom (in gymnastics, our remark) is a pretty big slip” (cf., [Ek 2021](#)).

All four judges regard Ferry’s performance as satisfactory, and they voted unanimously for him, allowing him to bring his talent as a Timbersports athlete to the next stage of the show. One of the judges says: “Entertaining absolutely. Unique? Without doubt. Is this anything I want to see again? Well, not really hungry for it. But I think the viewers want it, so I say absolutely welcome back”. In the end, however, Ferry Svan did not reach the show’s final of eight talents (who were mostly musicians).

In retrospect, Ferry Svan believes that his participation in ‘Got Talent’ was a successful way to expose both the sport and his own brand. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of representing the sport and his personality in a proper manner. He states:

“Within the sport, we do not want to be associated with the old [lumberjack] style with braces and flannel shirt. The sport should be considered as any extreme sport. If you appear in media contexts, you must make sure not to be perceived as a hillbilly”.

In some sense, we have, in the analysis of sport, moved away from Huizinga’s thesis, then paradoxically back to Huizinga, due to the “play element” in Ferry Svan’s exhibition of Timbersports at ‘Got Talent’. Svan’s performance resembles a circus act, but it is still sport in light of such factors as the time constraints. In the show, the skills of Timbersports are presented as a talent comparable to the talents of musicians or stand-up comedians. Sport becomes part of popular culture and blends with the logic of entertainment. Thus, we can observe a vanishing line between sport, show and circus (cf., [Eichberg 1995](#)). This can also be understood as a new qualitative step in the decontextualization of skills among Timbersports athletes as well as the previous decontextualization of the profession.

(B) Evidently, COVID-19 has restricted the possibility of holding various championships at arenas around the world. The internet has offered an alternative platform, even for sport. Accordingly, STIHL Timbersports® launched the Virtual European Championship 2020 as its first virtual international competition. The competition replaced the previously cancelled individual world championship, which should have been held in November at Partille Arena in Sweden, and was broadcast on 27 December 2020.

The competition consisted of ten athletes who qualified through national competitions during the year. In addition, the 2019 national champions from Great Britain, Hungary, Romania and Norway participated because the coronavirus pandemic had made national competitions impossible in these countries. Ferry Svan represented Sweden.

The competition format was customary for individual STIHL Timbersports® events, where the athletes perform the six contests: Underhand Chop, Standing Block Chop, Springboard, Single Buck, Stock Saw and Hot Saw. However, the locations of the competitions were unique and inventive. Each athlete conducted the competition at their place of residence, in accordance with local restrictions and strict hygiene requirements, between 30 November and 10 December and was filmed. In order to achieve similar conditions, the athletes competed on wood from the same logs that were split up into equal pieces and distributed among the competitors in each country after a lottery held in a Zoom meeting. All performances were observed by STIHL Timbersports® officials, and the times and video footage were sent to and approved by official judges.

These individual videos were later edited—“fabricated”—into one competition, the Virtual European Championship 2020, and was broadcast “live” 27 December, via Facebook, YouTube and Twitch. For Ferry Svan, it was thus possible to follow and compare the performances afterwards. Before the broadcast, he stated in a press release: “It will be exciting to see everyone’s performance and the results *at home from the couch*” (our emphasis). In this respect, the competing athletes were required to be silent about their performance, like a production of Robinson or Masterchef. Still, Ferry Svan said, “I think the competition format is really good and gives us the opportunity to continue competing, despite the situation around the world” (*Siljan News* 2020, 15 December). In retrospect, Ferry considers this new form of competition successful. He states that “it went very well, I was pleasantly surprised”, especially as it was so convenient to avoid traveling far to compete at the highest level. The only negative aspect of the competition form, Ferry Svan argues, was the difficulty of getting the adrenaline rush that arises the moment he meets the audience. Despite this, Ferry Svan hopes that the virtual form of competition can become a permanent feature of the sport—side by side with the live competitions—even after the pandemic.

This form of competition can be viewed as an additional step of decontextualization of sport, both in regard to space and time. Besides, the rationality of the entertainment industry and its production logics (e.g., produced predictability and showbiz) have a

substantial influence on the experience of the sport event. As Stephen Connor (2011) emphasizes, sport has regularly challenged our mundane experience of space and time. Sport, he states, moves, handles and manipulates—“plays with”—time and space, for instance with concepts such as overtime and attitudes such as delaying the game. However, in STIHL’s Virtual European Championship, time and space were “played with” in a different manner. Thereby, the editing of the contest afterwards supports the trend of a general decontextualization of sport.

4. Theoretical Outlooks on STIHL Timbersports®, and Beyond

In addition to this specific case, the general subject of this article—“sport in transition”—addresses several theoretical departures in which the current conception of sport and its progress and origins may be accentuated and blended through different processes of social change.

In a Durkhemian perspective, events and patterns in everyday life could be illustrations of social processes and, thus, have implications beyond its intrinsic meaning and significance. For instance, individual signs and manifestations of the division of labour in society have been recognized due to their impact on new forms of social coherence/solidarity (Durkheim 1964). Subsequently, the glamour and the flourishing of different multi-arenas, for example, generate social processes beyond the individual arenas. Thus, the directions in a contemporary sportification process will be directed and formed by the mixture of technologization, decontextualization, commercialization and eventification. In this section, we will rather briefly illuminate some of these trends and processes.

4.1. Sportification Processes

Of course, the classic conceptualization has shaped our understanding and view of sport and the development of modern sport. But at the end of modernity, it is scientifically justified to question the plausibility of such a view of origin and developmental logic.

The sportification process also adds to a trend towards more and more competitions in society in general, making it possible to create competition, in the mirror of sport, out of most things, from Quidditch to Masterchef and Science Slam (cf., Carlsson and Svensson 2015; Carlsson 2019). In other words, popular culture and society are becoming increasingly characterized by the logic of sport. This escalating mediatization has added new drivers to the process, beyond Guttmann’s categorizations.

STIHL has worked hard to make Timbersports a serious sport, with a focus on equality in competition, even though the fact that “wood is wood” may generate diverse conditions for the athletes. Special forests are the answer in this sportification process. As with eSports (e.g., Dreamhack), STIHL Timbersports® has received strong support in the sportification process through the media and entertainment industry. Besides, compared to eSports, no one will question the physical efforts involved in forestry and operating chainsaws, making people more likely to accept it as a modern sport.

As mentioned, skills in work have been origins of sport, and we have observed a sportification of some professions, that goes beyond competition as a leisure among i.e., chiefs, fire workers and policemen, with athletes directed to compete and not to work. In this respect, STIHL Timbersports® is related to a process in which professions and professional skills are transformed into sports and athletic aptitude. Here, of course, military pentathlon and rodeo can be mentioned as classic examples. The drive that turns professions into sport, by a sportification process, is another element in both the decontextualization of skills and the decontextualization of sport. Through STIHL Timbersports®, STIHL has converted professional skills to athletic talents, honed through training. At the same time, STIHL might use the sport to brand their tools and machines, not to be used in sports at all, but in the forests or the garden by ordinary people.

4.2. Technology and Authenticity

In modern sport, the search for peak performance as well as exceptional entertainment has led to the development of training methods, equipment and tools. In this respect, training—as well as the contests themselves—has become increasingly dependent on technological development. This development can be seen in the equipment of the contestants, from lighter running shoes and wetsuits to fibre rods and carbon bikes. Training has gradually become increasingly dependent on machines and appliances, from roller skis and treadmills to oxygen masks and high-air houses. In addition, sport has increasingly moved indoors, thus moving away from the influence of nature. This trend is captured in the concept of indoorization ([van Bottenburg and Salome 2010](#)).

However, technological developments in sport have been called into question in light of authenticity, which questions what a genuine sporting experience or phenomenon might be ([Bedná 2014](#); [Reid and Holowchak 2011](#); [Hurych 2009](#)). There are also researchers who claim that natural training has advantages over more rationalistic and technological training ([Svensson 2014, 2017](#)). Competitions using rowing machines (indoors) are an example that makes the above-mentioned problems clear. In our post-modern world, our representations and images can also be portrayed to appear more graspable or *real* than our reality ([Baudrillard 1994](#)).

These processes related to naturalism, technology and authenticity can be seen in STIHL Timbersports®, and they both illustrate and are illuminated by the concept of decontextualization. The qualities of the profession itself are precision, safety and knowledge of the environment. Through the sportification process, STIHL Timbersports® has basically stripped away the profession's natural and normal environment (i.e., the forest) via adapted arenas, while the variety of tools, from hand power (axe and hand saw) to machine (chainsaws in various models), seems to provide a mix of naturalism and technology (and equipmentification). Besides, the virtual event could give the impression of a produced—rectified—sport event, away from sport's natural settings, and the participation in a TV contest such as “Got Talent” builds on a logic other than the spirit of sport, despite the event's “sport-likeness”.

4.3. The Indoorization and Urbanization of Sport

The general urbanization of society has also affected the development of sport ([Horne et al. 2012](#)). Sports that generally took place in rural areas such as skiing, climbing and rowing have entered cities in alternative manners, in sprint, climbing walls and rowing machine competitions. Thus, sport has increasingly also been used as a tool in city marketing ([van den Berg et al. 2002](#)). In addition to this urbanization process, when these sports enter the cities, they are also performed indoors, due to the general trend of indoorization of sport in various arenas ([van Bottenburg and Salome 2010](#)). Naturally, this trend has also shaped the progress of STIHL Timbersports®, in accordance with the desire to present a spectacular show, not to mention the sport logic of creating a comfortable experience for the audience. Thus, former “lumberjacks” enter the cities' arenas as sport athletes, decontextualized from the natural challenges of the forest.

4.4. The Eventification and Commercialisation of Sport

Guttmann has argued that the pursuit for records was a part of the conceptualization of modern sport. However, with increasing doubt towards the quality of contemporary records due to trends such as escalating doping in sport, the significance of records has seemed to decline. In a post-Guttmannian horizon, and as an alternate characteristic of sport, the focus on “the event” seems to escalate. The essence of modern sport and its legitimacy and image is that all results, regardless of where the sporting achievements were performed, could be compared with each other through measurability and the pursuit of records. But the fascination with records has waned with the increase in doping and the blurred boundaries between genders and between what is human and machine. Instead,

the moment and the spectacle—the eventification—has taken over, placing the focus on excitement and entertainment (cf., [Carlsson and Svensson 2015](#); [Carlsson 2019](#)).

STIHL Timbersports® is evidently a part of the process of the eventification of sport, considering its focus on the show in national and international championships as well as the production of different exhibition games. In a sense, it is a “travelling circus”, albeit increasingly sportified.

In this respect, several competitions in STIHL Timbersports® have the character of an exhibition, not just of the athletes but of the equipment as well. Hence, the eventification process goes a step further and becomes almost a circus, similar to wrestling (WWE) productions. In these fights—or performing arts—the regular stress on uncertainty has become distorted by the production of a show or spectacle. Yet, notwithstanding the logic of a fabricated spectacle, it remains a physical activity with a semblance of sport: a “sport-likenesses”. Thus, exhibition games problematize the emphasis on authenticity, unpredictability, tensions and records. Still, they are conducted in a manner similar to that of ordinary games (sports), but without the tension of the result being counted or of the game being serious. Its imaginary setting is even accentuated. In recent history, media and sport have had mutual interest and benefits in their individual progress and internal logics. Today, however, the collaboration is more or less blended, as our case indicates, in a logic of entertainment and eventification (cf., [Sherwin 2000](#); [Carlsson 2014, 2019](#)).

In Sweden, STIHL Timbersports® is not part of the Swedish Sport Federation. One reason is the lack of children and youth sports, albeit the “talent industry” at Orsa Forestry Gymnasium. But more importantly, the sport is likely to be linked to entertainment, to business, to branding and to product placement, making it ill-adapted to the virtues of the Swedish Sport Federation and its umbrella organization (cf., [Fahlén and Stenling 2016](#)).

No doubt, sport has become a tool in the marketing of various companies. It is not unusual for a team to be linked to a company and even to be named after that company. Whole football leagues have been labelled by a company name, such as the Barclays Premier League. But the fact that an entire *sport* has been linked to an individual company and its brand, such as STIHL, is unique and quite remarkable, serving as a litmus paper for analysis of sport in change.

All athletes are obliged to use STIHL’s products in the competitions. In this respect, STIHL can use STIHL Timbersports® to brand and market the company and, by extension, their tools and machines. However, and paradoxically, the possible effect will not be shown in the sport itself, but in ordinary consumers’ use of the products in their gardens or the forest.

5. Conclusions

STIHL Timbersports® stands out as a useful entry for reflecting on the origin of novel sports in contemporary society. Thus, we have tested multiple paths as a first attempt to detect different perspectives and concepts that might be used generally to analyse the “genealogy” and “architecture” of novel sports in light of various social processes (cf., [Markula and Pringle 2006](#)). However, it is difficult to present a firm conclusion regarding distinctive and independent concepts due to the mixture of social processes that operate intertwined. Still, the practice of STIHL Timbersports® presents interesting trends and challenges in relation to our general comprehension and conceptualization of modern sport and its future progress, expressing, for instance, the “hybridity” of sports as well as the “amalgamation” of the forms of entertainment. We will focus on several such trends in this conclusion:

Firstly, this article, with its unusual emphasis on work and professional skills as alternative sources of sports, complements the Huizingian thesis on sport’s origin in play. Hence, the progress of STIHL Timbersports® could only partially be comprehended from the perspective of Huizinga, Elias and Guttman, with the thesis of play becoming increasingly serious in the logics of modern sport.

Secondly, Timbersports recalls the countless professional skills competitions held around the world, such as special championships for chefs or world championships in flower bindery. Few world-class florists would consider themselves athletes in an elite sport. Timbersports initially served purposes other than their current ones. Originally, the aim was to promote and improve professional skills. However, as the competition evolved according to the logic of sportification, the original aims have been lost. The competition started to take place for the sake of the contest, creating its own purposes instead of serving the material (professional) purposes from which they were born. In this respect, STIHL Timbersports® stands for a change from a work logic to a sport logic, where it seems to be no advantage to have a background in forestry to become a successful athlete in Timbersports. This means that the forest as an original—and genuine—context disappears and that, thanks to the sportification process, new talents are developed in training facilities. The sport—and the skills—become decontextualized.

Thirdly, the process of decontextualization is enhanced through the urbanization and indoorization of the competitions, which means that the sport—as many other sports—takes place at arenas in cities. Hence, the progress of STIHL Timbersports® exemplifies a general trend in contemporary sport.

Fourthly, STIHL Timbersports® includes competitions with both state-of-the-art and old tools. Both hand saws and axes and advanced chainsaws are included in the sport, thus reflecting the technology development, rationalization and efficiency of the forest industry while at the same time projecting the history of forestry, before the work became increasingly alienated with the arrival of rather powerful forest machines. However, due to “the image of a show”, the focus on the spectacular and heavy machines contributes to the eventification of the sport.

Finally, the process of decontextualization is, thus, enhanced through the eventification and commercialization of the competitions. There is certainly a clear sportification and a serious quest to win, but the pursuit of records as an inherent logic has been replaced by the actual contest and the challenges—and, thus, the immediate and emotional tensions—of a spectacular form of entertainment. This is also captured by the fact that the athletes might participate in forms of entertainment, such as “Got Talent”, not regularly related to sport. Moreover, the novel virtual competitions seem to be well-suited to editing and to the production of sport entertainment, thereby supporting the brand and, thus, the branding of STIHL®.

Hopefully, the subject of STIHL Timbersports® and our initial reflections on decontextualization and eventification of sport will progress strategy and offer a theoretical departure in sport studies for comprehending and analysing the development of sports in contemporary—post-modern—society, beyond the common conceptualization of modern sport. Admittedly, the most advisable manner to handle the conception of sport, and its definition, is to regard the concept of sport as “polycentric”, in a similar manner as socio-legal scholars have comprehended the law (cf. [Petersen and Zahle 1995](#)), and thus, their focus on e.g., legal pluralism. According to this departure, what is included in and regarded as the law can have different forms and characters, dependent on its settings and practices. This means that we, in the conceptualization of sport, ought to comprehend and depart from the various contexts in which sport originates and operates, which, paradoxically, also implies a contextual understanding of the “decontextualization of sport”, as our initial judgement of STIHL Timbersports® has demonstrated.

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Notes

- ¹ In 2018, STIHL, a German family company, had more than 17,000 employees and was the best-selling chainsaw brand in the world, with a distribution network of more than 50,000 dealers in over 160 countries.
- ² <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=223078548957292> (accessed on 1 October 2021).
- ³ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=223078548957292> (accessed on 15 September 2021).
- ⁴ <https://www.stihl-timbersports.com/sustainability.aspx> (accessed on 1 October 2021).
- ⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSwIFlmI4eA&list=RDCMUC8Nr0Vq0lRo5299y_G--XOA&start_radio=1&rv=wSwIFlmI4eA&t=39 (accessed on 14 January 2021).

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