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Karl Sandrich

Trinity College, karl.sandrich@gmail.com

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Philosophy of Sports:

Understanding How Friedrich Nietzsche and Magic Johnson Can
Work Together

Karl Sandrich
Philosophy Senior Thesis
First Reader: Dan Lloyd
Second Reader: Drew Hyland
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Introduction:

The first book I read in the philosophy class I ever took was Plato's *Apology*. Not a bad place to start, because above all the message I took from that book was the amazing power that asking why can have. Asking why almost always seems to lead somewhere more interesting, more valuable and more helpful. Asking why also seems to be something that can be applied to all sections of life. It is easy to see that some lines of questioning will be more helpful than others and since the time of Socrates many of the important Whys have been asked. That fact however does not mean that there are no further important questions to ask, ones that require serious thought and consideration. How does one determine what kind of new questions should be asked? Possibly by using Socrates' model of living life, talking to people and finding out what matters to them. Most topics will lead to long philosophical discourses, except for one. There is one piece of almost all human culture that plays a massive role in so many people's lives, yet there has been relatively little thought put towards it. Sports. Sports of all different kinds permeate almost all parts of modern life, yet there are so many questions that have not been asked about sports. The answers are still far away, seeing as the right questions still need to be determined. So what kind of questions should we be asking about sports? Why are they compelling? Why do they seem to play an important role for so many different people? Why and how is it able to unify? What role does identity play in the appeal of sports? Is excellence something that should be so appreciated, even when it occurs within a construct? Why do so many people affirm this construct, this illusion even when they know it to be one? The more questions one asks, and the more time one spends trying to answer those questions, one hopefully is getting closer and closer to understanding. I want to understand Sports. What I want to understand is more than just the cursory understanding that comes from being someone who

follows a particular sport. I want to understand Sports in terms of philosophy, which of course leads to the question: what does it mean to understand anything through philosophy?

Again going back to Socrates the big distinction he made for himself was that he was a philosopher, not a sophist, he was interested in gaining wisdom. He understood his search for wisdom as trying to understand a topic at its most basic level, its most complex, and all the points in between. That kind of breadth and depth forces one to think in ways that many disciplines simply do not force themselves to do. History, psychology, physics, sociology, and plenty of other disciplines can be used to understand phenomena in the world, but none of them do it like philosophy does. The philosopher should never run out of questions, out of issues that need working out. Socrates gets at this by saying that the people who think themselves wise are indeed not. Philosophy tries to not be limited by any type of questioning, it wants as many possible ways to attack the problem as possible, and that is the tool that philosophy offers in examining a topic. When applied to a specific case, Sports, psychology could give the answer that player X plays this sport because it gives him confidence in himself. And that is the answer that psychology is comfortable giving, but not the philosopher. The philosopher wants to know why does a person having confidence matter? What improvement does that bring to their life? How does their confidence change when they lose? Do they still have confidence win or lose? If they need to win to have confidence then why even play competitive sports, where there is a chance at losing? Why not simply play basketball with five year olds where the person knows they will always win? It is because the risk of losing needs to be there. If that is the case then the person actually values the opportunity to get confidence and not just getting confidence. However if that is the case then what is it about sports that makes it the best place for that risk taking to occur? Clearly the questions force more questions, and when that is the case, a

philosopher knows they are headed in the right direction, both for getting closer to answers but also that they are utilizing the tools of philosophy in the right way. Philosophy plumbs these depths, and from the outside it seems that it can get lost so easily, never finding its way back to relevance or general importance. And that critique is not always a flippant one, as there are certain philosophers or areas of philosophy that should examine themselves and see if they have lost sight of what they were shooting for, and who they were doing the searching for. In the area of sports that seems to be the opposite of the problem facing a serious philosophic analysis of the topic. What seems to be more problematic is the critique of the study being too soft, too open to the public, to lightweight. This is a critique of a different kind, because it stems from a place of non-philosophic thought. If one thinks that a topic is intellectually lacking it will take a lot of argumentation to change the person's mind. And it is so easy to put sports in the lightweight category, because lets be honest the people who are often most enthused about sports are not the most elevated thinkers. However there are two important rebuttals to that observation. The first is that just because the loudest of sports fans is not the most intellectual does not mean that there are no intelligent people who care about sports. And moreover because so many people who care so much about sports are not capable of fully getting at why this system moves them it is the perfect place for philosophy to step in and try and piece together what can only be motioned at. Plato's Cave is an apt metaphor, because so much discourse one hears from average players and fans about sports seems to be shadows or echoes of the deeper meanings. I want to try and piece together those meanings, the implications that the average sports person just is not capable of getting at. Now I cannot go any further without pointing out that in the previous sentence I intentionally used a poorly defined term, average sports person. What does that term mean? How do most people experience sports? At what level do they care most about their sports? Of the

work that has been done in the philosophy of sports much of it has focused on the player of the sport and that makes a lot of sense. Without a player there can be no sport. However that does discount the way that most people experience sports, and that is by being a fan. The average person engages with sports not on a field, but in the stands or watching on TV. They follow their favorite players, favorite teams, and the rivals of their favorite teams. Most people do this when they themselves never played the sport even close to the level of the professional or collegiate, but they still have a deep fiery passion for the game. Their love of teams, of entities that are larger than themselves is something that should be better understood. The desire is easily identified, the average person has no problem looking at fans and asserting, “They want something to identify with”. And while that is not necessarily wrong, it is at the very least unsatisfying. It begs the question of why do so many people identify with sports and not with other things? What does that identification give them that so many people, across all ages, economic, educational, and cultural levels seek it out? It is common that when people think and talk about sports they often come to an answer quickly, and it will usually be a familiar answer. One that has been heard, recited and repeated over and over again. However that is almost always a sign that the answer that has been given is not simply shallow, but rather requires so many more questions before any real kind of answers can really be reached.

So it is clear that there are all these questions, and that it is philosophy that can hopefully get closer to some kind of resolution, but where does one start? That is the first cause question, because by trying to start somewhere implies that the person has some conception of what is the fundamental nature of sports, and thus has to be understood first. However that does beg the question as how can one know the fundamental nature of something before all of the real analyzing occurs? A little trust is required at this point. This thesis will hopefully echo one of the

Hegel's goals in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where the reader will develop right along with spirit. In this work the idea is that the reader is developing with the writer, but simply that the writer is just a few steps ahead. There is a general plan in terms of clear points that have to be touched upon, ideas that need to be fleshed out, past arguments that have to be addressed and dealt with, and even some new arguments that will have to be introduced. The structure of this thesis is a little different than most. Before each of the three chapters there will be a short vignette that will try and ground the philosophy. The first story will give insight into the mind of a player, the second will give an account of how moved a fan can be, and the last will show the impact sports can have on a society. Similarly the chapters will tend to follow that path, but very often the different levels of sports bleed into each other. The first chapter will give a rough outline of what sports are, the nature of the people who play them, and then the rest of the chapter will focus on the parts of sports that speaks to human nature. The second chapter will use the philosophic model of examinations on tragedy to help better understand how viewers interact with sports. The last chapter will try and explain why it is only in sports that one sees fans that are so moved by what they watch. I am asking for trust from the reader and it should be given based upon the fact that the author cares deeply about you not getting lost in the depths of the subject, so that the real world seems far away, but also that the subject matter not be frivolous and waste your intellectual time. I ask for you to trust me because I am truly interested in both of us getting to a place of deeper understanding, more complex confusion, and hopefully minor resolutions that in the end will leave us reflecting that the time spent on this was not in vain, but in fact was valuable. It is with that request of trust that I wish to begin this modest excursion into the world of teams, phenomenology, friendship, bonding, hatred, winning, losing, frustration, exultation, hard work, pleasure, suffering, excellence and ultimately ennoblement.

An Insight Into A Player's Pain

Think back to when you were a child, no more than three years old. You do not have many things in your life that demand your attention at this age, except for one. You love to play basketball. Every single part of the game is a wonder to your three year old mind as well as your body. The fundamental bouncing of the ball is a challenge, as is making a basket, but you continue to play all the time. Every day of your life, for hours on end.

This habit goes on for years, playing this game, over and over again, day after day, hour upon hour. You are more focused upon this one activity than any other activity in your life aside from eating and breathing. No matter how much time you put into this, you always wish you could put in more. You know the feeling of a shot that is so perfect it does not even shake the net. And you are thirteen years old. You have spent more time in this one activity than most people spend getting their PhD, and you are not yet able to drive. You have long since moved past just playing by yourself, you have experienced competition with other people. People who were worse than you, almost your level, sometimes as good and very rarely maybe a little better than you. Often you play only against people who are much older than you, people who tower over you in height and out weigh you, yet you are still better. You now not only want to be better for yourself, but you also have a burning desire to beat your opponent. The two desires meld together into an inferno that fills you. It focuses your efforts that much more, you play more often, work harder, and invest more time into the sport.

Years pass again, and you have had nothing but success. You are eighteen years old, officially an adult, you have spent fifteen years, your playing of the game has lasted longer than

the Great Depression. Everywhere you go, people know you for your talents. Your hard work has been rewarded over and over again by success after success. You feel truly appreciated by your teammates, your friends, random strangers, your family, and it is all because of this game. Your ability is something you are sure of, it is what defines you, it is what comforts you. When you have troubles in the world, they are gone when you step on the court. When there are questions you do not know how to answer in life, you can go answer the question of how to put the ball into the basket. You have tasted victory, success, championships, and now that has intertwined with your desire to best others and improve yourself into a triumvirate of motivation. You work harder now, you not only play the game but you work out every day, all the food you consume is part of regiment that is exact and leaves no room for momentary desires. There is nothing in your life that does not relate back to the game, to improving yourself, to beating your opponent, and to succeeding.

You have now made it into the NBA, you have reached the highest level of competition. This is the ultimate battleground for you, where you can truly test yourself. And you have been excellent. You have succeeded because you have devoted every part of yourself to the game. The game is now not only your most important hobby, it is your profession. You had thought that before you were focused on the game, now you realize how wrong you were. When you stop playing the game you research, read and watch game tapes. You try to intellectualize what you need to do, what improvements you have to make, adjustments that will lead to more success. You are 24 years old, your time playing this game is now legally able to drink alcohol.

You are now given the ultimate opportunity, to play in the championship game. You and your team has reached the top of the mountain, and only one foe remains in front of you. Your team and you are closer than any other people you have ever known, you work not as a

collection of individuals, but as a unity. There is an understanding you all share with each other that almost transcends the ontological barrier that separates people from each other. You see in these fellow souls who have the burn marks of desire, who are driven like yourself, men who have also devoted their lives to this one end. You all have but one more game in front of you, one more opponent holding you back from your lifelong goal.

You have one more possession, one more chance. You are losing, but have a chance to win. You know how to score, you know how to do that better than anything else in the world. You have spent more time doing that than speaking to people, than reading, than brushing your teeth. You have one more obstacle in front of you to validate everything your life has been. You have the chance to validate your teammates, your brothers. This is the chance to complete the goal you had set for yourself so long ago you do not remember setting it. You have to only make this one shot, the singularity that the entirety of your life has collapsed into.

You miss.

When you find the words to describe that feeling tell me will you, because I don't know them.

Chapter One: Understanding Sports and People

The beginning of this chapter will cover a definition of sports formulated by Bernard Suits. This definition is used to simply focus the scope of discourse, and is not being used to argue about the possibility of definitions in general. Following that there will be a quick outline of the idea of responsive openness. This is an idea that Drew Hyland presents in *The Philosophy of Play* and it details what is going on within a person when they are playing a game. This concept is one that also will be used to limit discourse, because it is applicable to those who truly engage with sports, and those are the interactions that this chapter and thesis will focus on. The question now becomes, what is the best way to jump into sports themselves? Is the examination of specific sports best? Trying to figure out what makes bowling different than curling? That seems both too narrow an examination and fairly boring for both writer and reader. Instead the way that this discussion on sports will progress will focus more on elements of sports that can be in all sports. These will be what participants get from sports when those people are called by the sport. The topics covered will not be applicable to every single person who hits a baseball, but rather for the people who feel compelled to hit a thousand more baseballs. There will be three topics covered in this chapter: how love in sports serves as a model, the value of excellence in sports, and what losing in sports teaches people. Love plays itself out in different ways in people's lives and while certainly people fall in love with sports this will focus more on how love can train people in different kinds of love. Love of a particular individual is modeled by one's family, but other kinds of love like that of a friend, or towards an idea or an institution are more nuanced, and sports can help make them more intelligible. Excellence is something that seems to

naturally draw people in, it calls to people. This chapter will touch on why sport is a good avenue for people to try and become connected to excellence, and how it manifests itself in different ways. The last section of the chapter will deal with the converse, it will talk about what one learns when they lose in sports. Losing is something that exists throughout life, but losing in sports does introduce special cases and also gives some clarity on how loss can affect a person. Particularly with why losing is so painful, and then how people can respond to the losing. All of this taken together will refine the discussion on sports, while at the same time touching on a few key points that work themselves into sports in its many iterations.

Bernard Suits has worked through what he believes to be a definition of games, and extended beyond that a definition of sports. This is a bold move, particularly for any Wittgensteinian who holds to the impossibility of definitions. The reason that this definition is being brought up is not to defend the absolute validity of the definition or to destroy it. The value of the definition is that it is a nice way to group a lot of sports, it is helpful for limiting some things, and actually draws out some key elements of sports. There are four elements to games, and by extension sports: The goal, the means for achieving the goal, the rules and a term that Bernard Suits has created called the lusory attitude. Taken all together the definition is not being asserted as one that is above reproach, but as a helpful tool. With that clear caveat in mind I will briefly outline the definition Suits describes and then expand upon some points of particular interest as they relate to some of the more important experiences of sports.

There are potentially lots of goals in a game, but there is a fundamental goal that is beneath every other one. That fundamental goal is something that is presupposed before every other possible goal, is intelligible before the rules of the game are known or anything about who is playing is known. Called the *pre-lusory* goal it is a certain state of affairs. Examples will help

illuminate this idea, the pre-lusory goal of boxing is to remain standing and conscious as your opponent lies on the ground for at least ten seconds. That is the most fundamental breakdown of boxing, but it speaks to no specific elements of boxing. In boxing there are regulations as to how one can achieve this goal, what one can and cannot do. Those are the means, or more specifically the means by which one is allowed to achieve pre-lusory goals.

Means can be in reference to many different things, but lusory means, which refer to a pre-lusory goal, are more specific. Using the boxing example again, the lusory means would be using one's hands to hit the opponent so that they stay down and that is the only allowed way. A player is not allowed to shoot the opponent with a gun. The gun has been determined to be outside the scope of the means. Thus to use the gun would be breaking the rules.

There are multiple kinds of rules within a game, because while blocking in the back is against the rules in football breaking that rule is not the same as driving a car onto the field and driving that into the end-zone. Suits describes the most fundamental rules as *constitutive* rules. These are the rules that if you break you are no longer playing the game. If in a game of Hearts a player does not pass a low heart they are breaking a rule of skill, but are certainly still playing the game. If they grab each opponents hands and force them to show what cards they are holding they are not even really playing Hearts anymore. The object of the constitutive rules is to put limitations upon the pre-lusory goal, and all games have these rules that make achieving the pre-lusory goal more difficult. Part of the importance of rules is their relation to the lusory attitude.

The lusory attitude is what makes games possible, because it is an accepting of rules that are put in place to intentionally obfuscate a goal. In normal life if a teacher has a barrier that makes grading papers more difficult, they would try to remove that barrier. It is hard to imagine that they would do what players of games do which is not only embrace the barrier to reaching a

goal, but actually have constructed the barrier for themselves. That is because the teacher does not value the act of grading the papers, but rather values getting them done as soon as possible. And in one sense a runner wants to get the race done as soon as possible, but even more fundamentally the runner wants to do it under certain constraints, that following those barriers is just as important as finishing quickly. Taken together all of these elements are summed up by Suits as, "Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." (pg. 43 of *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*) That certainly gives clarity as to what can be called a game, and then by extension a sport, however this is a point at which a problem with the definition must be raised. It is not one of the Wittgenstein mold, but rather one that points out the fact that his definition creates a kind of hermetic seal around games and sports. The world of a sport is self contained and is not constituted by any forces in the outside world. This thesis will argue the opposite to be true. So again it is important to remember what this definition is useful for, and to only use it for that.

Within the simplified definition given above there is an important distinction to make between in terms of how games work in the real world, and that is that there has to be an attempt on both sides to overcome the obstacles, thus any game or sport that is fixed stops being a game. If a boxing match is fixed, where the outcome is not in question and one boxer knowingly enters the ring with the intention of losing, then that person stops attempting to overcome the obstacles and at the same time the second boxer has no obstacles to overcome. As has been stated before, the reason for this attempt at a definition is to limit the scope of what this thesis applies to. And it is with that in mind that even if a game that is generally considered a sport, like baseball, is intentionally lost then the experiences and structures examined in this work do not apply to that event. Part of the reason is that a whole new group of implications come from a fixed game,

different kind of responses, it highlights different important parts of human nature, and is potentially a very interesting issue to take up. However for the purposes of this work, it will remain outside the scope of discussion. Instead what has been laid out as games so far, and what will now be detailed as sports are what will be focused on.

Suits says that the difference between games and sports is not as drastic as say the difference between two species, but there are indeed differences. There are four particular elements that sports has: they are games of skill, that the skill be physical, that the game have a wide following, and that the following achieve a certain level of stability. Those four elements also may exist in other games, but if they exist in all four that is what makes them a sport. The first element, a game of skill is fairly self explanatory. It would seem out of place to call a game of pure luck a sport, and games of pure luck lack an important element of sports which is the fact that someone can get better at them through practice. Skills can be improved upon, luck definitionally cannot.

The next facet of sports, that it be a physical game is one that divides sports from a lot of games as well as being quietly highly important for sports. If the concept of sports comes up in casual conversation a question will be asked as to what is ultimately the difference between chess and golf? Why is it that one is a sport and the other is not? Fundamental to the difference is the fact that golf requires a large amount of physical skills as well as physical attributes. Even something like golf, which would hardly be called the most physically demanding sport, still requires a physical input. Part of the power of sports is that it forces a physical engagement. It gives sports a more holistic power, in that it drains both the mental and the physical, it calls upon the totality of a person. Games can require intense mental exertion, as clearly a game like chess does. But chess will never require the totality of commitment that sports can demand.

The last two parts of sports, a wide following and a stable following are most helpful in the context of this work because they help to eliminate. If one were to create a game that requires skill and physical activity, but only play it by themselves it would seem out of place to equate that to the sport of baseball. There is something about the public nature of sports that seems essential. Likewise even if a large amount of people knew about this sport and played it for a month, that too would not seem like a sport. Sports last through time, but they also develop other institutions around them. There are schools, research groups, and doctors who do not actually play the sport but focus their energies to improving the sport. There is a world that is erected beyond the soccer field that influences what occurs on the field but is not itself part of the game. As stated earlier, these designations are important for understanding what is being talked about when the term sports is used. To be sure many of the issues, elements, essences, descriptions and thoughts that relate to sports can relate to games or other activities. Sports is not something that shares no commonality with other activities; indeed part of the power of sports is that it so often evokes similar responses to multiple other areas of life. So while Suits is helpful to limit the discourse he does not really get to what is going on within sports, with the nature of the player. Drew Hyland is also helpful in providing a limit to the discourse, but he does so by outlining the nature of those who play.

Responsive openness is an attempt to describe a state that is best suited for play, and likewise for sports. The stance of responsive openness is one where the person is first open to the world, letting it inundate them. One has to be able to perceive differences and changes that occur. But simply being able to identify these adjustments is not enough, at least in terms of sports, because there has to be an element of action involved. There has to be a certain dynamic of changing one's own role based upon the information gained from the openness for peak

performance. One has to respond, and that is where the action and the perception come together to allow for the highest levels of play. It is also possible for a player to not be responsive to the world, or not be open to the changes that are going on around them, and still play the sport. Responsive openness is not a necessary part of sports in general, it is a necessary element of playing sports well. To fully understand this concept one also have to have an understanding of human nature even when it stands alone from sports.

Responsive openness is based upon a certain understanding of human nature, one that might at first seem paradoxical or at the very least in tension with itself. Hyland argues that human nature is one that vacillates between lacking and over-fullness, between monadic and relational. This two part system is explained by starting with the lacking nature in humans. He says that, “We experience ourselves, again and again, as incomplete, as being who lack, and as a consequence, who desire wholeness.” (Pg. 51) The experience of an unfulfilled incompleteness seems so intuitive that it almost does not need much argument. Opposed to that idea though is the fact humans can also give to others, implying that they in some sense have more than they require to survive. People have the experience of being “...in the very midst of striving to overcome experienced incompleteness, we also experience a kind of wholeness, more than that, a kind of over-fullness and over-flowing, in which, as we say, we ex-press ourselves.” (pg. 52) Those two forces Hyland argues are working within humans, and that in relation to those experiences is the fact that humans, he argues, are both monadic and relational. That debate Hyland points out is one that is well documented in the history of philosophy, with different thinkers falling on different sides of the argument. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard both hold to the concept of the individual notion of humanity. He quotes Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “..One must learn to love oneself- thus I teach- with a wholesome and healthy love,

so that one can be with oneself and need not roam. Such roaming baptizes itself “love of the neighbor” with this phrase the best lies and hypocrisies have been perpetrated so far...” (pg. 54) That sentiment is juxtaposed with Martin Buber who wrote, “There is no I taken by itself, but only the I of the primary world I- thou and the I of the primary world I- it.” (pg. 56) These two positions are molded together by Kant, who sees both parts working themselves into how humans interact and exist. Hyland describes Kant's wants to, “...maintain the co-presence of both conceptions not out of a love of paradox but out of a conviction that only this is true to human being.” (pg. 57) It is this fluctuating nature of humankind that Hyland sees playing out in responsive openness and thus how people engage best with sports. It is that notion of best that is important to hold onto, because when this thesis is talking about sports it is implicitly using a teleological view of sports and players. Players can not care at all about a game, and still play. However it is far more fruitful to look at those who are really engaged with the sport, because that then shows what can be found in sports, and is found by so many. Additionally valuable is that responsive openness sets the tone of examining sports with a mindfulness to human nature as well as giving a model as to how to deal with something that is fluid like human nature. The rest of this chapter will look at human nature with the changing state of human nature in mind. It will examine how sports connects with different parts of human nature, the first of which will be love.

Trying to understand love is about as difficult a task as there is and in sports how people come to know it, experience it, works with it, live with it, shows love's varied nature. There is a certain time in a person's life when they are in a transition phase when it comes to love. A child really can only understand love for their immediate family. An adult can have love for their family, a significant other, but also close friends as well as ideals or institutions larger than

themselves. That kind of progression of love is highly reminiscent of the way that Diotima describes the way love works in the *Symposium*. She explains that, “Beginning from beautiful things to move ever onwards for the sake of that beauty, as though using ascending steps, from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful practical endeavors, from practical endeavors to beautiful examples of understanding, and from examples of understanding to come finally to that understanding which is none other than the understanding of that beauty itself, so that in the end he knows what beauty itself is.” (pg. 48, *Symposium*) The metaphor of the steps is helpful to understand how love will be talked about here. This section will begin with love of another individual but not a family member, which in sports is a teammate, leading to friendship. The next step up will be how an idea can be loved by a person within sports due to sports revealing the idea and then giving a person the opportunity to affirm it. The last kind of love will be a love to the very nebulous idea of an institution that is loved even when one does not truly know what is being loved. Sports works through all of these iterations of love by giving a good model that people can follow later in their lives.

Far before a kid is comfortable with any kind of romantic love they can be comfortable with the love of a friend and often that love is forged through a team. To be sure few kids would categorize what their relationships with their close teammates as one of love in the moment, but upon reflection those are the relationships that best model the bond of friendship that one experiences later in life. Sports gives an opportunity for working together to achieve a mutual goal. That connection fosters a lot of the qualities that are instrumental for real friendship. Teammates will be honest with each other, harsh and brutal, pushing each other to achieve as best they can. People who are not close cannot speak as honestly as those who are truly united. Sports also allows for the friends to show what they are willing to risk for one another. A player

will sacrifice their health, or their own personal success for the betterment of the other. And that player knows the other would do the same. Particularly in sports Aristotle's idea of a real friendship is possible, because one player will see something in the other that they cannot do and admire in the other. It shows how a friend can help when one falls short, but also gives a person the opportunity to help someone they care about. There is a fluidity between the two sides, and all of this occurs without feeling forced upon either person. It feels natural, showing that friendship can come just from living, and to be open to that possibility of another person stepping in and playing such an important role in one's life. Of course those are all the ways in which sports can be a positive model for friendship, but it also shows how friendships can fail. A teammate can be like the other imperfect kinds of Aristotle's friendship, where it is a friendship of convenience, that the other person needs a role to be filled and once it is the person who filled it loses importance. Or one could be willing to sacrifice themselves for another, assume that idea is reciprocated, only to find that the other person does not share the same mindset. It is through bad teammates, bad friends, that one comes to really value the good ones. Sports offers both kinds of entries into that kind of love, but of course that is still a fairly intuitive kind of love. It is still love of another person. Sports also gives a path for loving the things more nebulous.

It is easy to understand a hesitation to using the term love when it comes to a person's relationship with an idea, but sports can indeed help people to come to love ideals of sports. There are so many concepts that people come to value intensely through sports, or maybe a more modest claim is that their appreciation can be expressed in sports. For many it is one of the most obvious, and that is competition. Particularly for the athletes that become the best they grow to love the competition that comes from sports. They desire the competition, they fixate on it, value themselves through it and eventually feel a need for it. That attachment to competition has been

said to be detrimental to society, the wrong thing to teach children, or a symbolic manifestation of a capitalist system. This is not an attempt to validate all of the ideals that are drawn out in sports, and more specifically how deeply invested one becomes in those particular ideals. Rather it is commenting on how sports has the ability to foster that kind of affinity for ideals, often doing it before any other activity does so in people. A less controversial example, and a more personal one is how sports helped to manifest an intense desire for justice in myself.

My thought process around sports was fairly normal for a kid as I liked competing, I wanted to win, and I grew close with my teammates to achieve these goals. However one thing that I could never shake was my desire for sports to be just. A brief anecdote was when I was nine years old playing in a Little League game, my team was losing and it was towards the end of the game. I came up to bat, and being an average player I had close to a twenty percent chance of getting on base. I hit a ball to the third baseman, ran to first as quickly as I could, and right before my foot hit the base I saw the ball hit the mitt of the first baseman. However the umpire did not see it that way, thought that my foot had hit the base at the same time, and thus called me safe. The opposing teams manager was furious and started yelling at the umpire (yes that is not a good element of sports, the fact that a grown man was yelling at another over a game being played by nine year olds, however try and leave that aside for the moment.) I was standing on the base, seeing this occur, and I knew that I indeed was not safe and was out. I walked towards the umpire and said so, because while I really wanted to win the game, I wanted justice to prevail more than I wanted to win. I remember having two reasons for trying to call myself out, the first was that the whole point of the sport was to determine who was better and that could only really occur if the game was fair. The second reason was that this was a rare moment in my young life where I KNEW what was right and what was wrong, there was no sense of ambiguity, and to the

nine year old me I felt compelled by that. I knew what was just, and justice should be upheld. I would not have been able to articulate why that was, or why it was so compelling to me. All that I thought was that I knew what was right, and had a responsibility to tell the truth about it. My desire for justice to be done also helped to bring out other ideals to value like honesty and responsibility. Sports gave nine year old me an opportunity to deal with these complex ideas in a way that was intelligible to a young me, and it also gave me an opportunity to act upon those values. That component needs to be mentioned because sports can give a sense of agency when it comes to these values. It is in fact quite rare for a child to both understand something like justice and then have the opportunity to act upon it in their life. Sports gives a place for these ideals to play out in life, a model that can be instructive for people for the rest of their lives. It is the ability to act based on an idea like justice that allows for a feeling of love towards it. That experience showed me that I have the ability to pursue justice, to be honest, and that to do so felt right. If a person is interested by the idea of loyalty, but are never given a chance to be loyal, how can they grow to find it precious enough to love? Thus sports works in a twofold way when it comes to loving ideas, the ideas are manifested in sports so they can be recognized and then sports gives the player a chance to embrace those ideas. Just to finish the story when I told the umpire that I was indeed not safe at first both him and the angry manager calmed down and let me stay on base because they respected my honesty in telling them. Of course nothing angered and confused me more. Why would they value my honesty only to totally ignore the specifics of it? There has never been a more frustrated nine year old being called safe at first than I was that day.

It is expected of a soldier to say they love their country, and for the sake of discourse let us assume that that soldier does indeed love his country. How did that person come to love

something as nebulous as a country? The soldier does not mean he loves every person in the country, he does not mean he loves every bit of land of the country, every law, or every tradition in the country. This is a function of the very nature of what a country is, an institution that is not well defined, ever changing and yet somehow remains the same. The question of identity is one that will not be really addressed here, because the driving question is not what is the person loving, or how does the country remain the same country through time, but rather what allows a person to hold this position, it makes sense for that person in what seems like an intuitive way? A model that is often cited is the family. Of the people who have asserted this Hegel is of particular note, as he strongly emphasizes how the family works to train young people to then enter into the state. Focusing on how the family influences people's relation to the state is clearly a good place to look as everyone has some model of a family to work with. However it also seems that the model of being a sports fan can be highly instructive on a person as well.

One difference in the two models is how it is much harder in a family model to disassociate the individual relationships a person has from the relationship of themselves to a system. In a family there is always the awareness that the people you care about you do so in part because of their direct connection to you. A person may love his or her mother because she fills the role of mother, and that whatever entity was in that role would receive that love. But a person also loves the specific individual that is their mother, and that the role has not been filled by anyone, but by a unique individual. That tension between the two is not inherently a bad thing, however it is something that does not occur usually when it comes to an institution . To refer back to the soldier metaphor he likely does not love the leader of his country in the way that one loves the leader of a family because the soldier does not personally know the President the way a person knows a family member. Despite the differences the family model can still be instructive,

but the model of sports does not have some of the problems that the family model does.

Sports is able to give young viewers the ability to connect to institutions where they do not personally know anyone involved. They are not going to build a relationship with the players on the team through personal interaction, thus they create a bond in a different way. They come to value people they do not know personally. That is something that is quite important for an adult in the world. It is not the easiest thing to do to connect to someone who you have never met and who lives a radically different life than you do. Sports can help someone get better at it, because they are doing just that. In many ways the life of a 6'3 multimillionaire who can run 40 yards in 4.3 seconds is as far away from the average American as is the life of El Salvadorian farmer. Clearly the reasons the average American would want to identify with the athlete is different than why he would identify with the farmer, but it is the process of how that would occur is the same. In terms of gaining a method from sports that also applies to the external world sports shows how one can have reverence for an institution over time even as the specific individuals in that institution change. The Supreme Court is an institution that deserves respect whether it is Justice Earl Warren sitting on the bench or Justice Anthony Scalia because the institution is larger than any one person. Sports is an early example of this, because kids go from idolizing a specific player on a team, that player leaves and the kid still is a fan of the team. The ability to unconsciously distinguish the specific individual from the institution is bred into sports fans. And returning back to the soldier metaphor that is an essential trait to have, as it would be problematic to have half of the armed forces quit their job whenever a President from a different party was elected. The idea of, "He isn't MY President" comes from someone who cannot personally distinguish between an individual and an institution. If that person were a sports fan would that mean they are categorically going to avoid that mistake? Of course not, but being a

sports fan can prepare people to do just that. It gives an early example of it. This specific conversation has focused on the metaphor of soldier and country, but the same method applies to a person's work, school, art, and family. And all of those components of life share another unifying element, they will most likely let you down at some point in life. Friends are going to fail a person, a governmental institution will make a mistake, and an activist group will lose their way for a time. All of these groups that the individual loves to different extents will cause that individual pain, and yet one would expect the person to not fall out of love. Sports teaches that from the outset, that just because you value something and you want them to not cause you pain has no impact on whether or not they will indeed harm you. It is peculiar to see the trait in kids where something causes them harm yet they still care for it. Often the idea of pain makes a child retreat, avoiding it no matter the cost. However with sports there are many 12 year olds who have had nothing but pain caused to them by their favorite team, yet they would never think of giving up the team. The ability to suffer through pain from the institutions you love, value, respect, and devote yourself to is as about as valuable a skill to learn as anything else. Of course if pain were all that sports provided few would partake. Sports also offers the sweet fruit of victory, and more foundational a path to excellence.

People are often drawn to excellence, they seek it out, and yet it is so ethereal. As with so many things there is a vagueness to it, a shifting nature to excellence in the everyday life. This is due to the Heraclitian nature of life, and that is frustrating. Man wants some kind of access to an digestible account of excellence, and sports offers that. Sports has a set metric for success. It allows for a clear answer, this team is better than this team, this player did better than this player. Of course there are shades of grey, areas for debate and discourse, but if a team wins they have done what is required of them to be excellent, they have proven themselves to be of a high

caliber, for at the very least the minimum required amounts of games.

Also people can try and achieve it, as excellence is indeed something that is attainable within sports. There is not really that feeling of attainability with parenting, because who knows if one is excellent, it is so complex, so ever changing, that how can one even hope to get to a place of excellence? They cannot. What one can do is try their best, hope they do a good job. But excellence? How does one be an excellent banker? A good one, sure. But excellence implies a knowledge that that person is significantly better than the average. That they are on a level by themselves. Competitions of all kinds help to determine this, but often there are no competitions for best waiter.

Sports also allows for excellence at all kinds of levels. If one is the best player in a pick up game, they may be excellent in that game, but ultimately they could not make a good high school team. But for that game, on that court, they can be excellent. They can do exactly what they need to, they can fulfill all the needs the team has for them, and be better than everyone they are comparing themselves to. Excellence can become something that is relative when looked at on a small scale, but also objective when looked at on a large enough scale. That is something that is special about sports, because it allows for a feeling of success, but also a realization of how limited one is. I can feel really good about being the best golfer of my friends, know that when we step out on the course I will be excellent, and yet I know that Tiger Woods is truly excellent. Maybe then my term excellent is a little confusing, because how can I be excellent on one level but not on all levels if excellent is supposed to be some kind of important metric? Because if that is the case then one could be an excellent father, if there is only one father around. But it seems wrong to think of it in those terms. Is it that from competition one can better determine excellence, and that not all excellence is created equal. It is only in

relational activities then that excellence can be achieved. There might be some feats that are excellent when viewed in one context, but not others. It seems a contradiction to claim a relative objective nature to excellence, but that is the case with sports. One can be objectively excellent, but only relative to the situation that person is in, and once that situation is left that person stops being excellent. Does one feel excellent when their team wins the league championship? Yes, that person feels like their team has excelled, that within that context they were truly excellent, because they achieved the highest that was possible. And that in another context that person would not be, but that was not the task set before the team. It is a matter of the task given, and that completing that task as well as possible is itself excellent. The other importance of having a task set before a team is that it gives a known level that has to be reached, which is instrumental in achieving the level of excellence. Reaching those heights is also dependent upon a challenge, and often that means having challengers.

If one's job is to push a button over and over again, the goal is clearly known but the challenge is lacking. The person can do it as well as is possible, but one would hardly call it excellence in a larger sense because there is no expectation of failure. The person had better do it over and over again, it would only be if the person failed that they would stand out. It may be hard to stay focused on such a menial task for such a long time but that does not mean that doing it is a sign of excellence. Part of gaining excellence in sports is that one is achieving something that many could not do. The many could be the general public, as is the case with professional sports, but it can also be as simple as those who are being competed against.

There is also the fact that team excellence is a unique kind of excellence, as it is a combination of individual success with a group success. On a team that wins you need to have individuals who are great, particular people who stand above the rest. However if one is on the

team, they too can be a part of excellence. They can somehow be connected to it in a way that they normally would never be able to. Team sports then has the dynamic of allowing for those moments of excellence to be shared with a group of people. Being a part of something that is special, something that is great, can stay with people for a long time. A kid whose team won the basketball championship when he was 11 or so does not remember that it was just one year out of many played, and for the most part that he was not very good. What he will remember is that as a kid his team won. That one year will be remembered, as the other ones get muddled together. That moment of excellence is not life changing thirty years down the road, but it is also not totally unimportant. It is part of the reason why parents want their kids to win so badly, is they remember the year they won, and how they can still remember it after decades. The parent is aware on some level that if their kid is able to win, that moment in time will stick with them. It is something that attains a kind of permanence within their child's memory. And as a kid, those moments of winning are all that matters. The simplicity of winning for a kid, it is heartwarming. It is so enviable. It is a visible expression of total fulfillment. There are few moments where one desire, one part of a person's life can so totally overtake them so that everything else fades into nothingness. Adults search for those moments of bliss in life in large part because they are so few and far between. And seeing a child in that moment of bliss, a truly pure moment, the power of that is uplifting, it is ennobling to see, to experience even from the outside. Of course those moments are not the norm in sports or life, instead what is pervasive is more unsettling.

There is specter that haunts all iterations of sports, it is the unavoidable fact that losing is always a possible outcome of every sporting event. Losing is really only intelligible once one has talked about structures like love and excellence, because it is only with those elements in the background does the weight of losing become clear. Losing in sports hurts, and that pain comes

from knowing that by losing the game the person is also losing the opportunity to experience a momentary excellence. The benefits of winning have to be understood for the loss to really be meaningful, for it to really stick with someone. Losing does stick with people, and it does so through certain emotions and feelings that surround the event. Feelings of guilt, shame, and loneliness all manifest from a place of responsibility. That responsibility is often placed upon a player because of their feelings of love and connection to others. But at the same time losing can be a disturbingly powerful isolating experience, in both the context of team sports as well as individual sports. In the end losing works differently in sports than either excellence or love because it teaches about more than just itself. Love is informative about how love works in the world, excellence brings out the value of success and the heights of life. Losing teaches about the nature of pain, guilt, the cold reality of an indifferent world, and competition. The teaching power of losing is not a novel idea, hence the cliché, “what doesn't kill you makes you stronger” but that sentiment underplays the negative force that losing can be in people's life. Indeed good may come from losing, but for the person who has to go through it that offers little comfort. Thus it is often only through reflection on losing that one can have the clarity to see how it teaches both about the world and about the person who has lost.

There are few places in the world of sports that creates a greater feeling of isolation than a putting green. That is a setting where total control is required, where the goal is in reach, yet it is ready to slip away at any moment. Contemplation has gone into the action, restraint has to be employed, total control over one's self is needed to make the putt. Losing in an individual sport highlights the fact that in the end that one player is on their own. Of course that is in part what draws people to individual sports, they desire that feeling of self sufficiency, of knowing they hold their own fate in their hands. To some degree that is true, as they are at the end of the day

the one performing, but it is also not completely accurate. When a player wins an individual championship, they are always quick to point out all the help they have been given, all the other people who have contributed to their success. A golfer who wins a Major will speak of their coach who helped mold their swing, the caddy who was there through all the practice, and their family who supported them emotionally and mentally. However any golfer who loses on the last hole does not blame any of those people. Somehow the people who were instrumental for a win are unimportant when a player loses in the players mind. In the end the role those supporting people play is not as important as what this dynamic says about how people relate to each other in different circumstances.

When the individual player wins they feel a need to connect to others because the success does not feel complete without others, but losing is something that is not shared but held within. The victor wants others to feel connected to those good feelings, they are overflowing with good will and have an urge to be associated with others. But the losing forces them to turn even more inward. Losing is a reminder of the flaws within people, the incompleteness that limits humans. There is no desire to connect to others, to let the feeling of loss flow to them, because being overtaken by loss is not a transitive experience. It is more than just the athlete does not want to burden another person with their loss, but that there is no way to really share it with another, because what has been detailed is the person's nature which has been found wanting. Losing in the context of individual sports highlights the monadic nature of people, while losing in a team setting highlights the relational nature of humans, sadly in a negative light.

When teams lose a close game very rarely is there a feeling that everyone deserves the same level of fault, and thus questions of responsibility heavily influences how people respond to loss. It is theoretically possible that there will be a sense that everyone equally contributed to

the loss, but two other options are staggeringly more common. The first option is that a player feels they are personally responsible, that they played the largest role in the loss, and that ultimately they are at fault. The other option is that a player feels one of their teammates is the one who is really responsible for the loss. That player thinking this may have contributed the loss, but that in the end it is the teammates fault that the team loss. The first scenario is one that often leads to feelings of shame and intense guilt. The player feels that their flaws, their inability to achieve has directly lead to the pain of their teammates. Those teammates who they fought with, whom they care deeply about, and whom they imagine would have won if not for that player. That player can be told that no game can be boiled down to one moment, that everyone made mistakes at different times not just them, but that just falls upon deaf ears. It may be a logically true statement, but the veil of guilt is blinding. Guilt is the kind of emotion that clouds rationality because it is so destructive within a person. Followed by the guilt is a sense of shame, because the player's flawed nature is now open to the public. The player has revealed their finite nature, and the player is ashamed that their own flaws have negatively affected others. Again this is an irrational perspective, because everyone is limited and flawed. This leads to the peculiar element of isolated in a relational way. The player feels emotions that stem from a response to their teammates, but at the same time they try and collapse back into themselves. The other option, where one holds that another is in the end responsible is in some sense less emotionally crippling, but more convoluted as to the way one should respond.

It is a silent rule in sports that one teammate is not supposed to blame another for losing a close game, because the truth is indeed that a confluence of events lead to the outcome, but that does not always stop the blame from being placed. If late in the game there is a mistake made or a job not done, then it might be hard for the player who messed up to not be blamed. The reason

that it is often unspoken that such beliefs are not to be voiced, is that a team stands together no matter what, but if one player feels that their teammate has failed them, how do they not become beholden to that thought? The player has worked incredibly hard, they may have even played well, and all of that was for naught because of someone whose goal was the same thing. This player's teammate has failed at their role, they are responsible for the pain the player is feeling, and ultimately they have committed an injustice against the player. What is ignored by that thinking is the fact that the teammate's failure simply gave the opponents the opportunity to win, and that ultimately it is the opponent who beat the team. The reason that the player does not hold the same kind of frustration and anger he has in regards to his teammate for his opponent is that it is the role of the opponent to beat the player. The opponent is being consistent with their own desire and goals, and there is a sense of correctness with that structure holding true. However the player's teammate who failed did more than just not complete their task, there is the sense that they betrayed the team. Betrayal is a heightened experience of injustice, and that injustice is a lesson that losing enforces over and over again.

If one spends enough time around enough children one thing that becomes clear is that many of them share a sense that the world ought to be fair and they take umbrage when they are shown that that is not the case. The sense that the world ought to be fair tends to surface when a kid does not get what they want, or if they work for something and still do not get it. That frustration makes sense, because every child starts from a place of having everything given to them. No baby can feed themselves, keep themselves warm and safe. What is important is given to the baby, and that is the earliest model given to people. Eventually we grow and understand that not everything is given to us, but that the important things can be attained. Particularly in America people are given the idea that if one works hard, they will be rewarded. The idea that

hard work will be rewarded is seen as a just system, and in particular it is an intelligible one. Thus when a kid deeply wants something, works as hard as they can to get it, they expect that they now deserve what they wanted, and in sports that is very often not going to happen. Sports does not care how badly one wants something, or how hard one feels they worked, the play on the field or court will determine the loser. The loser now is faced with the fact that hard work and desire did not lead to anything positive, in fact it has heightened the pain of losing by compounding it with a sense of injustice. What really is at play here is that sports shows the uncaring nature of reality, the cold fact that the world does not care about any individual, that nothing is assured to anyone. Many an adult would be totally willing to grant that last sentence as true, however in practice it is not easy to abandon those early notions that are implanted in the human thought process. In reality many of them still feel they are owed something by the world. I am not willing to say that if those people had played more sports, lost more often despite working hard, that they would lose that mindset. But being constantly reminded to the uncaring nature of existence presumably does something to change how people think as children into being able to face reality as an adult.

While there may be differences in how different kinds of sports relates to losing, there is the universal response to losing, which is pain. It does not matter the sport, or the level of competition because when a person really wants to win, and tries to win, losing is a painful experience. The pain stems from three places, and what is so striking is how long that pain stays with someone. The first place that the pain comes from is the intense longing that losing evokes, a longing for the goal that has slipped past. The power of winning is intoxicating, it is alluring, and once tasted it only becomes more of an allure when held just out of reach. Deep felt longing is a subtle kind of pain, because it is a fire that burns low and long. It is a weighted chain on a

person, slowing them down, a constant drag. The pain that grabs a hold on to a person, submerges them in suffering comes from a blending of disappointment and failure. The person is disappointed in themselves because they have failed in an unequivocal way. Dealing with disappointment and failure is not simple, it is not easy to fight that immediate response. And it is because that failure leads to the third source of the pain, a deep questioning of oneself. So often for athletes their success in their sport is constitutive of their understanding of themselves. They know that all the work they have put in reflects back upon them, that the life they have lived has been largely impacted by sports, and thus who they are in that life has as well. And generally that has led to a positive understanding of self, particularly for the great players, because they have had lots of success. But when they lose they now have so many questions to grapple with. Has it been worth all the work put in to simply lose? If they are in some way defined by their play, how does losing relate to them as a person? What is their real value if what they have devoted their life to ends up not working out? It might seem easy for someone who has no connection to sports to brush these questions off, but they are in fact questions that come from losing anything in general. If one has devoted their lives to becoming a mathematician, and they fail to get a job anywhere in mathematics, how is that person supposed to understand their value? It is an odd fact that the clarity of winning and losing in sports leads to such uncertainty for the player who is given a clear answer. Taken all together, the isolation, guilt, shame, betrayal, injustice, longing, disappointment, failure, questioning and deep pain that often leads to a surge in the competitive drive.

During my time writing this thesis I talked to dozens of people about their personal memories of playing sports in an attempt to try and learn what stuck with people over time. I spoke with people who had barely played sports, people who played sports their whole lives,

people who played sports currently, people who had not played sports in decades, people who played individual sports, people who only played team sports, and after all of the conversations one point stuck out more than any other. When asked to relate their best sports memory most people struggled, it took a good amount of contemplation about their sports history to come up with a specific moment, and often they could not think of one moment in particular that stood out. However almost categorically when asked for their worst sports memory a response was given seemingly before the question was done being asked. The answers were so specific it seemed like the event being related had happened the prior day. The memory of that moment had stayed with the person through time, sometimes decades, and while it did not cause the pain it once had, there was no doubt that it had forever found a place in the person's memory. Losing sticks with people, it is something that cannot be forgotten, something that holds on like a bear trap, and thus it is always in the back of an athlete's mind, always nagging them. This translates to an intense desire to escape that memory, and the only way is to win. What that then translates into is an increase in one's competitive nature. Being competitive comes from a combination of wanting to win with wanting to not lose. The balance that those two desires strike is unknowable, but they are clearly both in play. What is powerful about losing is that it increases both desires. Winning is appreciated more when one loses, it also feels needed to get past the losing. And the pain from losing is a constant barb for a player. The last factor that increases the competitive drive is when a player realizes that their opponent, the one whom they have to conquer, feels the same way they do. Their opponent is driven by the same forces, and that leads to a deep understanding between the two sides. That connection between the two is one part of sports that is so special, that is hard to find in other facets of life. And it is a shame, because by really knowing what one faces, having a true appreciation for the challenge makes attaining the desired

outcome so much sweeter.

This chapter has not focused on any well known teams, famous players, or important events and the reason is that it has been trying to get at something that transcends anything specific to only sports. This chapter ultimately is trying to better understand human nature. Granted human nature through the lens of sports and how it plays itself out through athletes, but human nature non the less. Sports works in different ways in how it connects to human nature, and certainly in more ways that have been discussed here. This is quite honestly a tame take on all the ways that human nature is interwoven with sports, but it is an attempt to detail some of the big parts. Love is about as fundamental as it gets, and if one wants to understand how people in the world come to understandings about love sports is something that has to be considered. Three of the reasons are that people are introduced to sports at such a young age, second is that it sticks with them for so long, and lastly because of the huge numbers of people who are affected by it. Excellence on the other hand seems to touch people so rarely, and that is what makes it so tantalizing. Feeling validated is such a strong driving force for people, and sports gives an avenue that is a little easier to tread than a lot of other ones. In part it is because of the certitude that sports can give, in part because of the different levels where one can be excellent, and in part because one can join with others to achieve something great, something that as a flawed individual they would not have been able to. Of course those flaws also are painfully pointed out in sports. What is powerful about losing in sports is how it teaches a person about more than just how to deal with loss. It teaches about connections to others, how to view oneself, how the world often works, and that probably the best way to deal with all the pain is working to ensure it does not happen again. But what is maybe the most valuable element of losing in sports is how it allows for an easy understanding of other people, in particular one's opposition. The ability to

understand a foe is not just a useful skill, but one that leads to more reasoned responses, deeper understanding of people one is closer to, and again allows for more self knowledge.

If this chapter is in large part dealing with human nature then many of the observations made should apply to more than just sports, and it does. Sports is not a special case because it is an island that cannot be connected to any other part of life, instead it is a web that pulls disparate parts of human life together, joining them in an intelligible way. The next chapter will expand upon this idea, by taking previous philosophic analysis on tragedy and use that as a model for understanding sports. The next chapter will work through that in more detail, but one point to remember is that because sports connects to so many other things it would be a natural response to try and fit into preexisting categories. But to do so is a mistake. Sports differentiates itself in subtle ways, and it that is in part what makes it something that is so hard to really get a grasp on.

The Forceful Feelings of a Fan

I have a twin sister named Thea. She was always a good athlete, and enjoyed playing sports growing up. She did not find her real sport though, the one that stuck with her until she started playing water polo. Water polo is about as physical as a sport can get, it is about as exhausting a sport as there is, and it is highly competitive where we grew up. The girls team at the high school we went to had won the state championship nine times before we got there, and they won it twice more in our first two years at the school. My sister played on those teams, and worked to find playing time. The team demanded that during season the players had to be in the pool at six in the morning, then after a day of class be in the pool for a few more hours of practice. They started every year with a practice on New Years day, and often the pool heater would be broken leading to water temperature that was just north of freezing.

By our junior year of school Thea was playing consistently on the team, but was not starting as the star senior of the team also played her position. That team failed to win the state championship, despite having very good individual players. The next year, Thea's senior year, she was starting in hole set. That is the position that sets up right in front of the goal, where the strongest players play and the position that takes the most punishment. The individual players on that team were not as good as players of years past, however they worked incredibly well together as a team. Through that team work they were able to make it to the state championship where they faced a great young team.

The team they were facing was well known to Thea, as the other school was from the same town, and the girls on the other team had been made a name for themselves. Two players in particular stood out, both freshman, both clearly bound to play in the Olympics for the United States. The opposing team had blown out Thea's team multiple times earlier in the year, and

there were no illusions going into that game. The chance of Thea's team winning was very small, they knew it, the other team knew it, and I as someone who had watched hundreds of water polo games knew it.

The day of the state championship was also the day of the counties Mock Trial competition, and I was the lead attorney for my school. Luckily for me the courthouse is only a dozen blocks away from my high school, so the moment my first case ended I was running, suit and all, to see as much of my sisters game as I could. I arrived just as the game was starting and once the game was underway, the other team may not have been ahead, it was clear that they were the dominate team. There was a feeling of inevitability, that at any moment they would assert themselves as the better players and win.

The way water polo works is that the hole set on offense has her back to the goal, with the defender on her back and the goalie in goal. The rest of the offense makes a semicircle facing the goal, and often the ball is passed into hole set, then passed out again, much like in basketball with a center. Thea was on offense, and I was standing about even with her on the side of the pool. The ball was being passed around the outside, then it was passed into her. Thea's head dipped down into the water as the person guarding her pulled her down with her legs right as the ball got there. Thea reached out with her right hand, grabbed the top of the ball. Her arm was fully extended to grab it, so as she brought her arm up instead of passing back out again she turned her wrist, thus having the ball face the goal and snapped her arm back. The ball slid by the goalie...

I am not the best person to tell you what happened after that, as to be honest I cannot remember anything specific. I remember being overcome by something, something more powerful than a personal emotion. Pride, joy, excitement, surprise. I cannot use any of those

words to describe it because if I do any reader will think of a time they felt those emotions and that does not do justice to the experience. Part of the reason this moment affects me so powerfully is surely the fact that my twin sister was involved, and I have a deep personal connection to her. But maybe of equal importance is that I knew how hard she had worked for that moment. I had seen the hours and hours she had spent trying to be able to perform in that moment. I knew how much it mattered to her, how important a role the sport played in her personal identity, how connected she was to the team. I simply was given a closer view of what all high level athletes go through due to the fact that I was her brother. That moment was so powerful for whatever the reasons, that four years later if I think about it for a long enough time I cannot help but cry. I am crying as this is being written, and I do not think I will ever fully know why it still has the effect of bringing tears to my eyes. I do not feel pain, or sadness, however I do not feel joy or exuberance. It may be that the way to describe it is a sense of something so pure, that I know I can never fully understand it. It is something that I, someone who played different sports my whole life, never experienced as a player, and have only experienced as a fan. I feel immense gratitude at having a chance to be connected to an experience so overwhelming..

What I can tell you is that the moment ended, the game continued, I had to leave to run back for my next trial, and the other team ended up predictably taking control of the game and winning. My sister lost that game despite her moment of brilliance, that goal, the hard work that lead to it, the devotion of each player to that team, to their craft, all meant nothing in the face of their opponent. They lost that game, and I am sure that is what sticks with them to this day. However that timeless piece of my existence cares nothing about the outcome of the game. Reality cannot touch those moments, those feelings, that experience of my individualized self

fading away and being overtaken by something truly transcendent.

Chapter 2: Tragedy and Sports

If the average American adult tells his coworkers that he is going to see the Royal Shakespeare Company put on a show of *Macbeth* over the weekend the response will be vastly different than if that same person were to say he was going to a Chicago Bulls game over the weekend. A person who goes to see *Macbeth* would generally be perceived to be more serious a person, more educated, more interested in intellectual growth, to have an appreciation for sophisticated topics, and in general a person making a more adult decision. The person going to see the basketball game is someone who still *roots* for a team, is a grown man *wearing* a sports jersey, he is someone who cares about frivolous things, and is a person who hides from reality with trivial distractions. Now the degree to which these thoughts would be articulated or even worked through is probably limited, however they are certainly there. The distinction that is made between the two options of viewing usually comes down to the idea that sports are superficial and theater, tragedy, is serious. Tragedy has for centuries been a field where important issues are worked through, people struggle with the most fundamental problems of life, and there is a long tradition of analyzing the value of tragedy. Sports on the other hand are

seen as a diversion from the very issues that tragedy is trying to get some handle on. However in truth this distinction between tragedy and sports is overblown and shows a real misunderstanding as to the real nature of sports. When one really examines sports fans, what they get from sports, how they experience sports, and why it drives them, one of the few ways to make all of this input intelligible is by understanding sports as tragedy. There is so much written on tragedy, what makes something tragic, what effects it has on the audience, and the lessons that it teaches. Those same writings work incredibly well if someone is trying to understand viewing sports. Three philosophers that have written about tragedy are Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche. All three of them end up examining tragedy in different ways, highlighting different elements of tragedy, and for the purposes of this chapter, they highlight different elements of sports. To be sure there are differences between classic tragedy and sports, however many of the salient points that are made about tragedy by these thinkers also apply to viewing sports. For Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche tragedy is an important part of life, it gets at important issues inherent in existence, and if the model of sports as tragedy holds then they are in effect saying the same things about sports.

The idea that I could cover all of Aristotle's position on tragedy in a few pages is as daunting as it is ludicrous. The same can be said of trying to cover Hegel or Nietzsche's full views on tragedy in that many pages, and thus this will steer wide of that attempt. I am far more interested in using some of Aristotle's insights and seeing how they relate to sports. Some of his ideas about tragedy, particularly how to make good tragedy, do not apply to sports and some fit remarkably well. The same is to be said again about Hegel and Nietzsche. For Aristotle what is most enlightening about tragedy as it relates to sports is both his description of the structure of tragedy, and then how tragedy works on the audience. Those are the two general areas in which

his analysis is most helpful in terms of understanding how sports works and in part why people are so involved in watching sports. In terms of structure Aristotle highlights the importance of plot, and while there are clear differences between plot in sports and in theater there are also important similarities.

The largest contrast between plot in the two areas is the fact that in plays the plot is known and in sports it is not. If the plot of *Waiting for Godot* changes and instead of Pozzo showing up a second time it is in fact Godot, then that play is no longer *Waiting for Godot* it is a new creation. In sports if the outcome is in fact known, then it stops being a sport as has been discussed in the prior chapter. However Aristotle believes that plot is so important in large part because it, "...is the arrangement of incidents, for tragedy is an initiation, not of men but of action and life, of happiness and misfortune." (pg. 13) The focus on actions is what works across the borders of poetry and sports, because while there may be select individuals that stand out in sports it is the actions that are generally focused on. The average experience of enjoying a sport as a spectator is dependent not upon who is doing the action but rather what actions they are doing, and team sports is one of the best examples of this. Fans feel a connection to a certain player on the team, they feel that they really care about that individual and how they contribute to the team. Their success and failure seems to matter to the fan. However when the time comes and that player leaves the team, it is not as if the whole fan base continues the support of that player, instead a new player on the team is supported. The reason for this is that the connection was never totally with the actual person who filled the role, it was always in large part with the job and that getting that role done was what mattered. In some sense it is not incredibly important the specific tragic character in a play that feels sorrow, the audience will feel fulfilled as long as they experience the acts of sorrow. Of course there are those rare times when the

individual is important in and of themselves, but they highlight the general importance of actions and not the individual. In sports there are certain players who are transcendent, who seem to be more important than the actual team or institution. If they were to leave a team, there might actually be people who would stop rooting for the team and root for the player. And in some sense that can be said for the greatest of tragedy, because while a spectator might feel sympathy for any tragic figure, the sympathy they feel for Oedipus is special. However most tragic figures, as well as athletes, are not on that level of importance. If one wants to understand the general experience of viewing tragedy or sports, it is generally the case that plot, actions being imitated are far more important than an individual. And that is why sports can be powerful even if the individuals participating in the sport are anything but special. Amateur sports can still be moving even if the performances are of a low quality, because what the spectator responds to are the situations that players are forced into. They are required to act in a situation that is trying, difficult, and requires a special effort to overcome the obstacle. How fascinating or moving watching that play out has the potential to be equal between the highest level of play and a low level of play, which seems bizarre. Should it not be that the best competition, the highest stakes will make the enjoyment for the viewer higher? If the actions that occur at a low level are more exciting they will be more engaging, despite the fact that the players do not play well and the stakes are not high. Now of course it is very often that the actions that occur at the highest level are just as engaging as those on a low level, but it is not an assured experience. A Little League game with seven year olds that is in the bottom of the ninth inning, two outs, bases loaded can be far more exciting and moving than a World Series where one team easily defeats the other. Aristotle does believe that to have the best tragedy though one does need to have certain figures involved, and the qualifications applies in both tragedy as well as sports.

Aristotle argues that in comedy it is the lowest among us that is made to look a fool, but what makes a tragedy so powerful is the fact that it is the opposite. Aristotle explains that, "...Homer, for example, represents men better than those we know... tragedy imitates those who are better, comedy imitates men who are worse than we know them today." (pg. 5-6) In tragic plays Aristotle considers the hero to be better than the average person in moral character, or nobility. In sports moral categories are sometimes erroneously put upon athletes, but in reality how they are better than the populace is their physical achievement. And by using that classification of better it brings up less problems than Aristotle using more nebulous criterion like goodness. It is very clear that the person who can run 40 yards in 4.12 seconds (Bo Jackson ran it in that time, the fastest of any NFL player) is better athletically than the vast majority of people. It is that awareness of the superiority of the athletes that in part makes their losses more impactful, because even great players lose. Indeed even the "greatest" are going to lose, and that in some way excellence does not categorically lead to victory. That is not a comfortable fact, because if the best are not ensured success than those who are far below the best likely only have a sliver of hope for success. Indeed it makes far more sense that the average person will most likely lose or fail. Additionally Aristotle argues that another element in the tragedy is when there is a reversal and recognition of how the intended objective is not going to work out. There is a point of clarity for the audience and a point of clarity for the hero where they become aware that fate has doomed them. What is the most crushing part of that dynamic is the fact that the audience knows this fact often before the hero does. And thus if our lives are anything like the heroes we may have intentions that we believe will work out, but they could already have been reversed and we simply have not found out yet. While this thought process is going on, and the tragedy of the event is being felt by the viewer, Aristotle then talks about how that is a helpful

event for the spectator as we are then experiencing catharsis.

Catharsis is possibly the most well known idea Aristotle talks about in relation to tragedy, as evidenced by the fact that it is an idea that is applied to fields well beyond tragic plays. Catharsis is one of the biggest benefits from tragedy in an Aristotelian framework because it gives an outlet for the vileness that resides within humans. People enjoy tragedy because, "...through pity and fear it achieves the purgation (catharsis) of such emotions." (pg. 12) For something to be purged it implies that it is already within the host, and it is not an outlandish claim to say that pity and fear are fairly common emotions that people have. Tragedy and sports gives an outlet for these emotions. This idea of catharsis can be extended beyond just pity and fear and apply the model to other emotions, particularly when it comes to sports. It is a sad fact that the audience does not feel the process of catharsis working for emotions like joy, teamwork, or contentment but that likely has to do with the fact that for this purgation to take place the emotions have to be powerfully felt within the person. It is a common argument that sports fans get to let out aggression, violence, anger, and other emotions that have very little place in the modern civilized world. Indeed it is common for people to attest to sports doing just that. That experience gives people feel that they have a sense of why this system works, why it is effective and important in their lives. Asking the question of what do sports do for people gets many quick answers, there are well established lines of thought that most people are aware of and bring up. It is that fact that Aristotle believes is also so important in tragedy, that people are aware of the imitation of life going on, and because they are aware they can give their thoughts on what the imitation means.

Both tragic plays as well as sports are clearly a constructed event, and anyone involved would be willing to admit that fact, and it is important that the constructed nature is not forgotten

because it makes both tragedy and sports all the more effective. Aristotle believes that what tragedy is doing is imitating, and part of why that is something that people connect to is because, “Then, too, all men take pleasure in imitative representations.” (pg. 13) Aristotle is describing human nature as being drawn to imitation, or mimesis. Michael Davis in *Aristotle's Poetics* teases out how mimesis works when he says,

“Imitation always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really has no beginning or end. *Mimesis* involved a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. Thus the more “real” the imitation the more fraudulent it becomes.” (pg. 3)

He continues the argument by saying that what is going on is that because we know this to be a construct, we can try and put all the pieces together ourselves, thus we imbue certain meanings to these imitations. That ability to decide what imitations mean is something humans like to do. They can do it because the imitation is intelligible, it is manageable, it is limited and constructed. People feel comfortable talking about the issues that are brought up in tragedy, or how a certain theme is expressed. The same is true of sports, and it is part of what inspired me to write this thesis. At least with tragic plays there is a common awareness that the great plays are working on multiple levels, and that if one wants there are depths to be plumbed. With sports it is often the case that people feel they have a general sense of why people like sports, even if that person themselves does not care for sports or has not spent much time on sports. In my time casually speaking to people about the idea of the philosophy of sports the responses usually generated are, “People like to have a sense of identity” or “It is a way for people to let out powerful emotions”. Neither of those positions are wrong, but at the same time they are clearly

not all that is going on. But what is interesting is that there is a common account of this massive phenomena in human history, it is not a terribly nuanced or deep account, and people are for the most part okay with that. There is something nice about having an understanding of sports that deals with human nature, is aware of the fact that it is constructed, and leave the analysis there. That ease of access to a perceived intelligibility is a rare commodity in the world today, and it is part of the reason that sports are so liked. The unintelligible is daunting as well as being hard to relate to. Sports, much like tragedy, allows for our fascination with imitation to flourish at the same time that we gain a purging of negative emotions. Those are a few of the elements of Aristotelian thought on tragedy that also work for sports. His analysis is very heavily focused on the individual and their relation to tragedy, particularly how the individual viewer relates to tragedy. Hegel will focus much of his energy on very different elements of tragedy.

Hegel in large part wants to look at tragedy through the lens of competing structures, how they interact dialectically, and what that then means for those within those structures. It is often the case with Hegel that to truly understand one of his positions one needs to situate that position within a larger context of his thought. This attempt will try and avoid that, instead trying to tease out some of his arguments that can be understood even if the highest forms of art in different epochs is not fully laid out. Instead this will focus on his reading of Greek tragedy and the mechanics that are at work within it.

Hegel's use and reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* is both highly illuminating as to why the play itself is so effective as well as to helping to explain his own philosophy. Hegel sees in *Antigone* a key component that Greek tragedy has, and that is the fact that what is in contention here are two systems that are both valid, yet opposed to each other. Hegel explains it as,

The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has justification; while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and *infringing* the equally justified power of the other. The consequence is that in its ethical life, and because of it, each is nevertheless involved in *guilt*.” (pg. 1196, *Lectures on Aesthetics*)

Hegel uses the example of *Antigone* to show how two different sets of laws can come into conflict, yet both are totally valid, and when two opposing characters follow the two different codes they are morally just in doing so. In *Antigone* the two laws that are set against each other are the cities laws and the laws of the Gods. Creon is following the laws of the state, while Antigone feels compelled to follow the laws of the Gods. Both are in the right to do so, and both are in the wrong to do so. However what is so interesting about Hegel's position is how he argues that,

...it is not *this* particular individual who acts and is guilty; for as *this* self he is only the unreal shadow, or he exists merely as a universal self, and individuality is purely the *formal* moment of the action as such, the content being the laws and customs...But the two laws being linked in the essence, the fulfillment of the one evokes the other and-the deed having made it so-calls it forth as a violated and now hostile entity demanding revenge (pg. 282-283, *Phenomenology*)

What Hegel sees represented so well in Greek tragedy is not simply a person's battle with unfortunate events, but rather two different systems of existence that are incompatible with each

other. Hegel's focus on the structure of conflict and rejection of the importance of the particular individuals is similar to how Aristotle views the best tragedy to be. Aristotle believes that it is the plot that matters much more than the individual, and while Hegel would be hesitant to use the term plot, he at least is somewhat aligned with Aristotle on the value of the individual character. All of that said the individual characters do end up suffering in the play. Creon loses his family, Antigone her life, and neither the side of the city or the Gods "wins" in the end. One would be tempted to say that Antigone wins, as by the end of the play the most common reaction is to be fully in support of Antigone's position. However Hegel would argue that Creon is fighting for another ethical structure, that of the city which he has the responsibility of protecting. And it is the difficult position of a leader to stand by what is best for the city at times. Reinhold Niebuhr argued that personal ethics and social ethics were incompatible, as did Machiavelli. It is easy when watching *Antigone* to simply assert that the personal should be more important than the state in this matter, however no government could function if that was the position that was held, especially not a government that just underwent a civil war. That being said, Creon does error by the end of the play, and should have had Polyneices buried and the Chorus even says so. The point that is so poignant is, "...Hegel's great insight is that Creon does wrong in the very act of doing what is right." (pg. 153, *Hegel's Theory of Tragedy*) What leads Creon to the end is what Hegel calls "tragic firmness" a trait that all tragic figures have. It is the inflexibility of a position that leads to the tragedy. And there are few things that end up being more inflexible than the position that players put themselves in.

Athletes from the very start position themselves as opposed to an other, and there is no way out of that opposition. No player can decide that they no longer want to be in competition with their opponent and yet still succeed. There is a need for one side to lose for the other to win.

Entering into the world of sports means you are entering into the world of guilt. There is a sense that when one enters the world they enter into an agreement to be at odds with others. So both sides agree to this. They do not do so because of any negative feelings for the other, but because they have an intense goal that they are hoping to achieve. That goal is not an unreasonable thing to want, and is a common desire. A life goal could be to live ethically, and in sports it would to win or more moderately to do one's best. In sports if one wants to win, there will be a loser, and the loser wants to win as well. Indeed they are right to do just that. When one side wins they have done a good thing for themselves, they have completed their goal, but they have also done a bad thing. They have crushed the goal of another. The dilemma is unavoidable, and one would not want to really avoid it because if one does so they are forfeiting any chance at their goal. So what is a person supposed to do? Not play sports? However they want to play sports as it has so many benefits, many of which have been outlined. Hegel would not say that one should avoid sports, because one should also not avoid living an ethical life simply because to do so means putting oneself opposed to another person. Tragedy works because it helps to show the predicament we as people are put in.

There is another element that is particular for sports, and that is the fact that there are actual people who are put in the position where they, "do wrong in the very act of doing right" whereas in tragedy they are fictional characters. This gives the situation an even deeper level of importance because it gives it more tangibility and permanence. The greatest actor in the world may bring Creon to life for that time that the play is going, but eventually Creon disappears again into the pages of the play. However an athlete does not stop existing simply because the game is over. The athlete's wrong or right actions continue on throughout time, and the ramifications of their actions also do not simply affect other fictional characters, but real people.

That is what makes the experience in part so powerful for the viewer, because they are seeing both a representation of life, as well as real life. The struggles that the players are in are not the full struggles of life, they are mimetic ones, but they are also struggles that stay with real people, haunt real people, for the rest of their lives. Creon's actions can never have the same kind of ontological force as those of an athlete because in the end there is no one whose life is damaged because Antigone cannot bury her family.

Hegel speaks of the guilt that comes from the conflict, and that feeling can be found in sports, which makes it even all the more bizarre that people would engage in this action. Why would people actively choose to participate in something that even if they win, they still feel a negative feeling? The first answer is that the positives outweigh the negatives. That when one wins, or plays their best, they rejoice over that fact so much it blots out any feeling of remorse over the guilt felt by the opponent. Another answer is that both sides understand what is on the line, what is at risk, and they understand that, "it is not *this* particular individual who acts and is guilty; for as *this* self he is only the unreal shadow". That clarity of position, both sides understanding what they are agreeing to, that they are involved in this systematic combat, and not a personal one, is something that should be worked out. So often in life people feel personally attacked, or that others are out to *get* them. It is often hard for people to see that in fact what is occurring is not personal, but simply the function of systems we live in. If a person feels that their job is being taken from them by an illegal immigrant, they will become incensed, and not because the immigrant has broken the law in coming here or any other grandiose reason, but because the person who has lost their job feels another person is stealing from them. That mentality of holding onto individuality within a system, both for oneself as well as seeing the individual in the opposed system, is a Hegelian nightmare. Now it is not uncommon to make that

mistake, and it is easy to see why the mistake is made. People have a hard time separating their personal identity from things they do or groups they are a part of. And that is what is so powerful about sports, because how on earth is it possible that two boxers can go into the ring, punch each other in the head for an hour, and afterward not feel hatred for their opponent? There are few things in the world that seem more like a personal attack than someone punching another person in the head, yet boxers can separate who they are from what they are doing. Boxer A understands that Boxer B is not in truth fighting Boxer A. Boxer B is really fighting his opponent, and in this case it happens to be Boxer A. The reason Boxer A can understand at such a deep level that he avoids feeling personally attacked is because he is doing the same thing. This is exactly the structure that Hegel describes in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as Self-consciousness externalizes itself. Both sides understand each other implicitly and both sides are trying to dominate the other, not out of malice but out of a personal need to succeed. However it is also that connection to the other that can facilitate the guilt. Boxer A does not feel guilty for beating Boxer B. They are two pieces in the game, two sides of systems that are opposed to each other. However the person Boxer A may feel guilty for beating the person Boxer B. For example, Boxer A wins the fight, he does not feel guilty for winning, he did his best and his best was better than Boxer B's best. There is no need for remorse when Boxer A thinks of it in those terms. However if Boxer A then sees Boxer B crying on the mat because of how devastating the loss is, Boxer A would likely feel remorse. The reason for that feeling of guilt would be that Boxer A is looking at an individual who is in pain, and Boxer A understands that pain better than anyone else can, because those two men share so much. When the two people see each other as human beings that is when the guilt occurs. And this is also true for Antigone and Creon, because Creon does not feel guilty for punishing a criminal. He feels guilty for punishing Antigone the person.

What makes tragedy so powerful is the fact that the audience is able to observe all of this, engage with it, but not have to work through the *Phenomenology* to do so. There is an implicit understanding for the viewer of what is going on in tragedy. What the viewer is seeing Hegel would argue is the inherent structure of existence. And the viewers perspective on the game itself is different than that of the players. But what cannot be forgotten is that the fans are themselves within a structure, and that when one uses Hegel's lens of looking at different structures it leads to an interesting analysis of fans and how they act.

The fan of a team, a team that is great or terrible, will have a spectrum of feelings for the opposing team. The main spectrum goes from loathing from the depths of the fans' soul, to a simple preference that that team not win. At the same time there is a different spectrum that fans' have for evaluating other teams, and that is a spectrum of respect. Often it is interesting that the two spectrums do not correlate. The reason is that for a fan the first continuum is determined by the nature of the particular fan base. Thus all Red Sox fans hate the Yankees, will always hate the Yankees and there is nothing that can effect that. However what can change is the respect that those same fans have for the Yankees. This is a different experience than that of say politics, where if the Republicans win the Democrats do not say, "Well in the end they deserved it because of how well they worked as a group and how much effort they put in." That statement is not made in politics because each side feels that their winning is categorically better for the society than when the opposition wins. That is because in politics each political party sees themselves on the side of the truth, of what is right. In sports though each side has a legitimate claim for success and what distinguishes the two sides is preference, not a larger issue like truth. The initial response to this example might be to say that this difference shows why politics is more important or serious than sports. However that is misappropriating the conditions that value

arises from. Both sports and politics share in gaining something from winning, however sports also gains something if they do not win. The process of working for wins, of each game, of the day in day out battles, those are all give the sports fan something of value. In politics it is far more all or nothing. Additionally in sports the fan is much better at seeing the Hegelian fact that both sides are justified from their perspective to want to win than the member of a political party is. It is an easy metaphor to make in the contemporary political climate to compare Democrats and Republicans as teams who just want to win and do not care about governing. However it is unfair to sports teams and their fans because fans are far more aware of the brilliance of a victorious opponent than members of political parties are. What is important here is the fact that in sports the viewers themselves, even the ones who put themselves on a particular side, can see the validity of the other side. That is not always the case in all areas where two systems come into conflict with each other. Being able to see these interactions are important, not so much for Hegel, but particularly for Nietzsche.

Prior to any discussion of Nietzsche's views on Tragedy one has to note that saying almost anything is the "Nietzschian" perspective on something can usually be countered by another text that he wrote. Nietzsche does not hold a consistent opinion of Tragedy throughout his writing. This makes it problematic to assert the definitive position he holds, but one does not need to to still gain value from what he wrote. This analysis of Nietzsche's view on tragedy will be limited to what he wrote in *Birth of Tragedy* but with the knowledge that there are other perspectives. The first place one starts with the work is to understand what the distinction between the two sides to tragedy and art in general, the Apollinian and the Dionysian. Nietzsche says that, "The terms Dionysian and Apollinian we borrow from the Greeks, who disclose to the discerning mind the profound mysteries of their view of art..."(pg. 33, The Birth of Tragedy,

Kaufman Translation) this structure of disparate Gods is further explained in terms of what the two represent. When Nietzsche writes on Apollo he says Apollo,

“...is the soothsaying god. He...the deity of light, is also ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy. The higher truth, the perfection of these states in contrast to the incompletely intelligible everyday world, this deep consciousness of nature and healing and helping in sleep and dreams, is at the same time the symbolical analogue of the soothsaying faculty and of the arts generally, which make life possible and worth living.” (pg. 35)

And opposed to the Apollinian understanding is that of the Dionysian which Nietzsche describes as,

“Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man...Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of *maya* had been torn aside and were now fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity.” (pg. 37)

Hegel would be an obvious model of an Apollinian thinker, and while tragedy is inherently in the form of Apollinian thought, what differs the two is that tragedy can have Dionysian elements. Hegel is not simply Apollinian because he thinks the whole is knowable or because everything is dialectically logical through and through, but because he thinks all of this

and thinks it is the ultimate truth of the universe. Nietzsche expects people to hold truth values within the Apollinian world, and one needs to if they are going to function within the world. However one must also be aware of the limitations of this structure of existence, and that this is not the way things really are. Tragedy can fit that exact model because as Aristotle says, it is supposed to represent real life but also make the audience well aware that it is not real life.

When trying to talk about Nietzsche's understanding of Dionysian tragedy what happens as is so often the case is that Nietzsche's own words do a better job of explaining than anyone else can, "...and this is the most immediate effect of the Dionysian tragedy, that the state and society and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature." (pg. 59) However one must have the element of Apollonian because being too far into the Dionysian, "...true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs any motive for action, both in Hamlet and in the Dionysian man." (pg. 60) The two sides only can work when taken together, and Nietzsche fully believes this because he holds that when the Socratic style superseded the Apollinian element in tragedy, true tragedy died.

Nietzsche describes Apollo as the god of individuation, restraint, form, beauty, illusion. Apollo is simply put a hero. All of these elements can be seen in tragic heroes, but also in sports figures. What is more of an individualized moment than when a diver is standing atop a diving board preparing to dive? That person is physically removed from other people, they are standing by themselves high above a large body of water, there is a real danger for serious injury, and they are almost naked. That person may have hundreds of people who have helped them get there, but all of that is unimportant in that moment. There is complete separation from the rest of humanity in that moment, as that individual is only in contact with the inanimate. Or another

example of how a football team consists of at least 15 players, far more often it has over 40, yet a single player is often plucked out from the group and considered upon their own merits. They are thought of as a monadic island despite the glaringly obvious fact that they are on a team. The individual is so often sought out in team sports it can at time seem like the team is nothing more than a group of individuals that happen to have a goal that coincides with one another instead of a singular goal.

Restraint is definitionally a requisite element of sports, as has been described in the definition of sports, it can be described as self imposed restrictions. How restraint works in sports has been already discussed, thus this will simply highlight some of the points. Restraint allows for a focusing of efforts, and thus allowing for individuals to reach their highest possible levels of development in those specific areas. Restraint allows for a decreasing of randomness and luck, thus increasing the chance that outcomes will be determined by skill. Restraint allows for better intelligibility for a viewer. Knowing the limits of action allows for fans to better hone in on the sport. The overarching function of restraint is that it allows for individual benefits in particular, whether it be individual improvement in a skill, individual intelligibility, or individual enjoyment.

There is a particular form at multiple levels of sports. The first is the actual playing of the sport, in terms of how one performs the actions that are required. What is of importance here is the dedication to particular forms, understanding those forms, changing them. There are certain players in different sports who have bad form. Jim Furyk in golf, or Reggie Miller in basketball have what is considered a bad form. That is often bred out of players, they are molded into a form which they are to follow. Granted this bad form can work in specific cases, but it is clearly the exception to the guideline, and more often than not the player with bad form is a bad player.

On a larger scale there is the form of the sporting ground. The field is formed in certain ways, very often with specifics. There are some things that are allowed to be different from place to place, but a baseball field has to have the form of the diamond, the tennis court has to have the net and the certain length from end to end.

In both cases though form increases the depth and complexity of the sport. Analyzing the form of a golfer's swing or trying to perfect one's own swing adds so many more layers to the game. Part of the reason sports are so captivating is that the details that one can focus on are so numerous. There are so many moving parts, so many little adjustments to be made, that one feels like they are often never done improving. Conversely the form of where the sport occurs can have two kinds of effects depending upon the consistency of that form. Due to the fact in football there is a first down every ten yards players can instinctively come to know what in certain circumstances will be required of them. A wide-receiver knows that he has a certain amount of room to maneuver in, and it will always be the same. This works much like restraints do in that it allows for a honing of abilities. When form slightly changes it can hone abilities as well, because it forces players to adjust. Golf courses have a wide array of changes that can be made from one to the other, and those changes allow for variance and creativity. But even in the cases where form slightly changes there are still constants, in that every golf course has a tee box and a putting green with a pin. Form is omnipresent in sports and it is a good thing that it is because it is a necessity if there is to be beauty in sports.

The aesthetics of sports are clearly a large element in sports whether it be in the playing or the enjoyment of watching. It is as obvious as when people use the term, "The Beautiful Game" in reference to particular sports. Beauty is something that is hard to prove to exist in sports, as the question of how does one prove there is beauty in anything is a complicated one.

However I can personally attest to the beauty of sports. It is important to distinguish the kinds of beauty that different levels of sports has. When one is playing a sport there is the opportunity to have a more detailed experience of a play, thus having a very specific appreciation for beauty. When a ground ball is hit to a shortstop, fielded and thrown to first before the runner gets there, that is a beautiful play. That play may not be beautiful to the average person, or even a fan. But the sound that a ball and a glove make when they come together, that sound when it hits the sweet spot in the heart of the glove, that is beauty right there. That sound evokes youth, exuberance, joy, insouciance, and simplicity. The feel too is almost indescribably perfect. It is the rare time in philosophy where brevity is called for because the best way to describe it is, it just feels right. No other superlatives are needed, it is an immediate response of something just being the way it should. Those two experiences are well known to anyone who has played baseball, the feeling of catching a ball right in the aptly titled sweet spot. However on a particular play, only the shortstop knows that beauty. It does not matter if millions of people are watching, only one person in the world can know the deepest level of the beauty of that moment.

Conversely there are times when the player is too involved in the specifics of an event to fully see the beauty. In synchronized diving two individuals are ideally going to perform the exact same acts at the same time, resulting in identical looking dives. Now neither of these people will be able to see the totality of the two dives, and thus they cannot fully see the beauty that is contained within those moments. It is really a matter of scale of examination. The spectator has an easier time seeing the totality of a play, and thus seeing the beauty in that event. Beauty then works on multiple levels within sports. It is processed in different ways, it affects people to varying degrees in different ways. The multiple manifestations of beauty accentuate how instrumental it is within sports.

In the end possibly the most fundamental element of sports that is Apollinian is the illusion of it. Sports is a construct, it is an event that has an agreed upon set of rules, limits, regulations and it does not occur naturally. Additionally if one thinks of illusions in a Freudian way, the illusion is in part wish fulfillment. Sports fulfills wishes of most people, in that it helps to organize and make the world intelligible. Additionally what makes it a truly powerful illusion is how easy it is to forget its illusory nature. When one is playing the sport, or really involved in watching, the fact that it is a construct is forgotten totally. People devote their lives to it, even though they may know that it is made up. That is a deeply powerful illusion, because even having the cognitive ability to see that it is fake is not enough to stop one from being engulfed in the illusion. And the illusions go deeper than that, because playing the sport is one thing, being aligned to a sports team is an even greater illusion. Being a fan of a team is the highest illusion because so often the reasons to support a team are created by the fans themselves. It could be random chance, being born in a city with a team, or just arbitrary decision making that has set a person to follow a certain team. But people like the illusion, they are comforted by it, they even gain positive things from the illusion. And that is a key point to remember that even though something is an illusion that does not mean that it is worthless or purely negative. The illusion, because it is a construct, can do so many different things for different people.

If a person is in need of something, say validation, that can only come from an external source it is unlikely it will manifest by itself at the needed moment. The only way that the person can get what they need is if they make an internal decision to engage with an outside force. Sports, and really any construct, can provide what that person needs. So if a person needs a sense of camaraderie to not feel isolated, life will not organize strangers to approach and ask the person to help them in a mutual goal for twenty minutes. But a game of pick up basketball fills

that role perfectly. A person can make the internal decision to seek solace in something that appears to be truly external. This example of cognitive dissonance comes about because sometimes the truth of reality needs to be sublimated in an effort to make the living of life easier.

What makes sports Dionysian are all the times where the Apollinian fades away, and one is left with something else. One of the problems of the Dionysian is that it is difficult to articulate because it is an event that moves past individuation, and thus reaches the limits of what language can deal with. The Dionysian experience is one that is intelligible only in reflection. In the moment one is unable to understand what is going on, because there is no one. There is no I that is doing anything, the limitations that constitute a singularity have disappeared, and thus there is only a unity of what was previously individuals. One way to understand how the Dionysian works in sports is to examine the Apollinian elements of sports and then when they fade away.

One of the most cliché statements in sports is, “There is no I in team” and while the blandness of that message almost bowls one over, the reason it is so well known is that it so often works out that way. Very often a coach will extol that mantra to a team to promote teamwork and unity. However it is an experience that is also being described, because when a player is really in a team, they annihilate themselves into nothingness. Some of the ways that people differentiate themselves from another person is with differing desires, goals, methods of achieving those goals, different levels of effort and commitment, and think of themselves as a wholly separate being, all of that can fade away in sports. Of course there is an ontological physical separation between people, but the mental differences can be slowly whittled away in sports. The two people will perceive an event from two different vantage points, but their mindsets can be identical, they can be working in such harmony together that they indeed seem

to work as one. In the ideal rugby scrum there are eight men who join themselves as physically close together as they can, and then as a group they exert all their energy into one goal. The men are in such harmony working together that the exact moment that one pushes, they all do. There is a blurring of the line between an individual's strength and that of the groups. And the experience of not having any real conception of the limits of oneself extends beyond just the physical for the player.

When one watches a team win a championship one of the most common sights is that of players with their eyes glazed over and seemingly lost. They are lost in the moment, in their team, in the magnitude of their accomplishment. Certainly they are not like that for the whole celebration, they run around, cheer, give hugs and make speeches. But there are moments throughout the celebration where players are consumed by a feeling that is larger than themselves, where they are tapping into such powerful emotions that emanate from a place beyond their own individual response to the event. The player is connecting to forces beyond himself, but it is hard to specify what they are. The reason for that is in those moments the person loses themselves, they lose the ability to consciously think through thoughts, as to think is to individuate. But the common trope of “the moment being larger than one person” is a common response. It bears repeating though that the moment is fleeting, and indeed so is any experience of the Dionysian whether it is for the fan or player, and those short moments when individualization disappears does so in part due to the intensity of the moment.

Nietzsche firmly believes that people can get closer to the Dionysian, but as they do so they increase the force of their experience, and it becomes too much for a person to handle. Many of the examples that have been used are of moments of joy and exultation, but the Dionysian works with pain as well, and moments of the utmost pain in sports can lead to a

dissolving of individualization. When a fan watches a last second loss for their team, there are many responses. One is of disbelief, where reality will somehow change and events will actually unfold in a different way. That is an Apollonian response. However there are the times as a fan where the response is a sense of overwhelming grief. There is the sense of reality slipping away, but not to be replaced by other actions, but rather by a unifying wave of emotion. It is a fleeting thing, but in those moments the structures that form life into individual pieces fades away.

Form is clearly something that gets erased in those moments of the Dionysian, and because of that so too does beauty. Beauty is in large part determined by what frames it and by having a comparison. Simplicity, elegance, complexity, discipline, recklessness, subtlety, and other elements that can fold in together to make beauty clearly require form existing, to speak nothing of individualization. And whenever those lines are drawn, when the forms are made, there is a kind of restraining that occurs. Those imposed limits are good, as they lead to the list just given, as well as the positives mentioned in earlier pages, however they will always be mediating the experience.

The last element of the Apollonian that disappears in the Dionysian is the illusion. Illusion is a concept well trodden in philosophy, something that has tomes devoted to it. It is that knowledge that limits this discourse on illusions, because any bold claims would require thorough responding to past thinkers. Instead here illusion will simply be spoken of in a simple context, that an illusion hides something. Illusions can and do far more than that, but all illusions are to some degree obfuscating something. Not necessarily the truth, or conversely a falsity, but there is a thing beyond the illusion. There can never be an illusion in the Dionysian because there are no things to be hidden by illusion. The illusion becomes annihilated and all that is left is what Meister Eckhart would call “an undifferentiated oneness” where questions of truth or falsity are

irrelevant because there is literally nothing, no-thing left.

If an Aristotle, Hegel or Nietzsche scholar were to read this chapter they would undoubtedly throw a fit at the basic reading of any of those philosophers position on tragedy, and I am the first to admit that this reading of those philosophers has been anything but innovative. However a new reading of past thinkers or being groundbreaking was never the aim of this chapter, or this thesis for that matter. People far more well versed in philosophy have devoured the tomes written on these thinkers, and those people are the ones to read for nuance and creative readings of important texts. It seems like a philosophic sin to simply *use* Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche to understand something other than them. However as is so often the case with truly brilliant thinkers, their insights can be applied to topics they may not originally have in mind. Using their insights to better understand how sports works seems like a very pragmatic approach, because if the overriding goal is knowledge then one should always rely on smarter people. And because there are so many similarities between tragedy and sports the perspective of those philosophers tells a lot about sports. There are of course differences between how the philosophers view tragedy itself, whether it be Nietzsche and Aristotle having different views on whether or not tragedy purges the viewer of emotions or if tragedy enhances them. Or Hegel examining the structures at work while Nietzsche talks about the individual experience. The differences that these philosophers have are worth thinking about, but this chapter is not going to come up with a way to synthesize all of them together. Nor is it going to point out all the differences between tragedy and sports. Aristotle talks about how important plot is, in part because the thought of the play progresses is important. What could be more different than in tragedy knowing all of the major plot turns and ending while in sports not knowing with certitude how any of the game will play out and certainly not how it will end? Sports and tragedy

are not the same thing, and while that does not imply then that one must be better than the other that is often the assumption that is made. And after going through all the similarities the two share, it is probably the biggest difference that tends to make people see tragedy as more sophisticated and thus more valuable. In the end sports is more accessible than tragic plays, it is easier to get involved with, to have it deeply effect someone, and it can do so many things to someone that they are unaware of. Tragic plays generally require more work than sports and it is wrong to then lend more worth to tragedy because of that fact.

Talk to a Philosophy 101 student the first time they read Kant, and they will likely be convinced that philosophers always value the inaccessible over the accessible. The truth of that aside, it is often the case in philosophy that digging and digging in a certain area leads to harder and harder ideas to understand. Often the place that a philosopher starts is incredibly complicated and they have only just begun working on the subject. There then is an assumption that parts of the world that many people feel comfortable with, or have a grip on probably does not offer the same kind of levels as other topics. However sports is a subject where part of its beauty and complexity comes from the fact that it can impact so many people without them knowing exactly why and having no real conception of all the different ways it affects them. And as someone who has tried to come to some conclusions about sports, tried to go beyond the simple answers, I can attest to how the role sports plays for people is elegant. It flows back and forth between being highly important to being of minor importance. It connects people together and then can isolate people. It provides peaks and troughs, teammates and opponents, teaches values and at the same time accentuates preexisting values of society. Sports can fill so many roles, for so many different kinds of people, at so many different levels and that is what makes it unique in how it impacts those who follow it. There are certainly fans of other entertainment in

the world, but the outcome of a performance of The Royal Shakespeare Company does not have the same kind of impact upon their fans that the outcome of a Real Madrid game does. The last chapter will attempt to understand why it is that sports has the special kind of following that it does.

The Hero to the North

Terry Fox was born July 28th, 1958 in Canada, and if you have never heard of him you are worse off for it. He grew up loving sports, was a basketball player and long distance runner in high school. When he was 19 years old, a freshman at college, Terry was diagnosed with osteosarcoma a type of cancer that starts to develop near the knee. He was told that he had to have months of chemotherapy, and that he would have to have his right leg amputated. The doctors informed him that if he followed the treatment he would have a 50 percent survival rate. After losing his leg he embarked upon a training program with the relatively speaking modest desire to complete a marathon, but privately he told himself what his real goal was. He wanted to run across the country of Canada, a run of over 5,000 miles, on one leg. He started on April 18th, 1980 in Quebec with plans to raise money along the way for cancer research. The run was titled the “Marathon of Hope” and Terry planned out a regiment of running a marathon a day. His leg had been amputated halfway down his right thigh, and unlike current prosthetics his leg was

made out of steel, hardly known for its ability to absorb shock.

When Terry started the run he did not have much success raising money, largely being ignored by the media and the general public. That however would not last long, as his run went from being a little heralded story mentioned on the back pages of local newspaper to the lead story for every media outlet in the country. The further and further he ran the more people grew attached to his story, his journey, and the more money he was able to raise for cancer research. When Terry reached Toronto for example it was estimated that The Cancer Society received over 100,000 dollars in one day alone. Terry continued his run despite the heat of summer, continual shin splints, an inflamed knee, spells of dizziness, cysts on his stump, severe tendonitis in his ankle and of course the whole time he was running into the Canadian wind. On September 1st Terry finally was overcome with sickness in his lungs forcing him to stop and seek medical attention. He was driven to the hospital, doctors ran some tests, and when they came back into Terry's room with the results before they uttered a word Terry said, "It is the cancer isn't it?" It was, and it had spread to his lungs. Terry was forced to stop his run after 143 days and 3,339 miles and having raised 1.7 million dollars for cancer research, with donations continuing through the winter months to reach over 33 million dollars.

On June 28th, 1981 Terry Fox died of complications from pneumonia induced by cancer. The Canadian Government ordered that all flags be flown at half mast, an honor almost always reserved for state figures. His funeral was televised nationally and hundreds of communities across the country held memorial services of their own. In 1999 a national survey found Terry Fox to be Canada's greatest hero. The Terry Fox Run is an international event that takes place in over 60 countries, involves millions of people and has to this day raised over 500 million dollars for cancer research.

That is a bare bones detailing of the history of the man, and his huge direct and quantifiable impact upon his society. The unknown component is how the citizens of Canada relate to this person, this story and how it helps to define how they see themselves. American's do not have to think long about the countries heroes, they are the names of schools, on money, have monuments and their own days. Often it is the case that the greatest heroes are portrayed as intellectual titans who helped to shape the country. Terry Fox is not beloved because he seems so far removed from the average Canadian, but because he represented what they hope to all have. Terry showed a normal person doing what is hard, achieving what is great and reaching for the stars. He did all of this while still being flawed, being stubborn and quick to anger, brash and sometimes abrasive. His is a memory that is cared for not because he is a mythical figure who stands above us all, but because he so clearly came from our ranks. He fought the burden that the world placed upon him, sought to make a change, and did so out of sheer force of will. His actions were heroic, but a special kind of heroism that can connect to people and enrich their lives simply by its existence. People can do that without stepping into the realm of sports, and societies have nothing stopping them from becoming identified with a person like that. However there is something truly gripping about the image of a solitary figure running by putting one foot down, needing to pop himself up so that he can throw his other leg forward, and the road stretching out beyond the horizon.

Chapter 3: Why Sports and Nothing Else?

There are two types of entertainment that have a significant amount of spectators the first is sports and the second can be generally termed art. The title of art covers things ranging from music, painting, architecture, literature, plays, comedy and other productions that viewers enjoy. All of those types of art are enjoyed by people, they are valuable in society, and they share certain elements with sports. However what is undeniable is that none of those types of art have the same kind of following that sports does in both the intensity of the following or the number of followers. There are many people who are cinephiles, devour information about movies, yet rioting over a movies poor performance is anything but a common occurrence. People devote their whole lives to bands, listen to all the music, follow the band everywhere, yet there are not often nationwide celebrations when the band's record sells very well. The following that sports has is different than the following that art has and it is because of the differences between the two categories. There are three major differences, first is that sports is necessarily based on competition, the second is that sports is never fully knowable, and third that there is an objective value system that can be applied to sports. This chapter will work through all three of those iterations in sports and how they are not in art. Following that though is the question, are those the only three elements that are needed to have the kind of following that sports has? The answer is no, and how one can know this is those three components can be found elsewhere in life, for example in work. Work is capable of having all three of those categories applied to it. So it would logically follow that if all that is needed to create a massive spectator base who is devoted to following something are those three things, then why are there not people who follow the success and failure of companies for entertainment? To be sure people follow the developments for personal financial game, but not for entertainment and those have different motivating

factors. The reason that it is not followed for entertainment is because there are three parts to sport that are lacking in work, first is the aesthetic nature of sports, second is that sports is significantly easier to identify with, and lastly because sports is an affirmation of human life. In the end it is the fact that all of these different forces come to a head in sports that leads to its unique place in society.

Competition as well as all the other characteristics that will be covered in this chapter are necessary requirements for sports as well as being something that is appealing to many people. Competition in sports can come in many forms and how it develops in sports often changes depending upon the specific sport. In some sports there is a deep competition between one individual and their opponent. In another it is much more about a team competing against another team. In either manifestation for the viewer there is something very captivating about watching this competition. The reason is that that competitive level heightens the quality of play, the intensity of play, and it makes the stakes higher for the players. Competition makes players want to perform at their absolute best, which means training, focusing and eliminating things from their lives that would hinder their performance. That leads to a higher level of play when the play starts, and the competitive nature of it lends itself to a heightened intensity. The players care more and thus push themselves harder during the game, pushing themselves throughout the entire contest. And because they have killed themselves preparing, have forced themselves to play as hard as they can during the game, winning and losing matters more. All of these factors are there for the viewer to pick up, to understand and leads to a deep connection to the sport. The world of art can be competitive undoubtedly, people can create art in large part because of a feeling of competition, however competition is not a necessary requirement for art. Art can be absorbed without any of the competition seeping through, but it is the omnipresence of

competition in sports that influences the kind of spectators it has. The competition is reliably there, it is unavoidable when consumed and that consistency of presence leads to a consistent following. The fan knows that they will observe a competitive exchange, and they know other facts about the sporting event there always remains a certain level of ambiguity which is also appealing.

If I go to see a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* I will deeply enjoy myself, the performers, the humor and sorrow of the play, but all the while I know that Shylock will not get his pound of flesh. Granted if it were the first time that I saw the play I would not know these facts, or have any idea of how it would turn out. If I listen to a song for the first time I can be truly surprised at how one movement transitions into another. But in either case if I want to ever enjoy the song or play again, I certainly can, but I will be doing so with some knowledge of how it will turn out. A person cannot enjoy that lack of knowledge every time they view their favorite play, but they can every time they watch their favorite team. A sports fan would likely know a large amount of facts about the team and sport they are watching. They could know how much time there is to play the game, how many players will play, tendencies of the players, plays that they will run, the rules they have to follow and the basic structure of there being a winner and a loser at the end of the game. However the specific ways in which the game will play out is truly unknown as is the ultimate outcome. Sports strikes a balance between the known and unknown for the viewer. That middle ground that sports inhabits is a stimulating place for fans to be put in. There is comfort that comes from having a knowledge of many different important specifics, but there is also suspense at every iteration of the sport due to the lack of knowledge. The knowing gives the spectator the idea that they can predict what will happen, but always present is a fear or hope at being proven wrong. The consistency in sports fans devotion in part stems from that fact.

It also comes from the fact that when the knowing has been done, there is an objective way to determine the value of what has occurred.

If a person asserts that a Django Reinhardt guitar solo is better than an Eric Clapton guitar solo that person can make arguments and be persuasive but the argument has no definitive answer because there is no agreed to criterion for value in art. Artists would abhor the idea of there being imposed metrics of value, and the argument can be made that art is a better system because it sheds any hope at objective truths. The merits of that particular discourse aside there is something about the clear value system that comes from sports that is appealing to people. Sports has a certain level of murky value judgments, determining the specific value of one player versus another in a team sport for example can be quite difficult. However at the core of sports there are answers to questions, and those answers have both permanence, clarity and give closure. In a world where possibly the only appropriate response to the reality of the world is a state of constant aporia those moments of simple clarity are a reprieve. Of course it is clarity about a constructed system, however due to the ambiguity of the outcome of the contest the clarity feels authentic. There could very well be an argument made that humans should not seek out closure or clarity, that embracing the absurd nature of the world is avoiding the lie of sports. However sports does allow for the cold reality of an uncaring world into its structure, and in the end the certainty that sports gives is a brief reprieve from the weight of doubt. Zarathustra gives the command to affirm the illusion, and the illusion of sports is one that happens to provide some certitude.

It would be wrong to think that the characteristics that have been laid out so far are all that is needed to evoke the kind of fan response that sports holds, because there is another structure that has those same qualities yet has few if any fans. The general term work has all

three elements yet one would be hard pressed to find a person who follows the quarterly reports of AIG purely as a spectator. Companies are clearly in competition with each other, and this is a competition of the highest intensity. The stakes are massively high, because if Ford goes out of business that is devastating for hundreds of thousands of people. Ford is doing its very best to beat GM, it is employing every method it can think of, using every tool available to them and seeking every edge. Yet there are very few country wide celebrations when Ford makes more money in a year than GM. Additionally how a company will do is never fully known, even if there are many important pieces of information available. A person may know what seems like all the important details of a company, yet be blindsided when the company performs differently than anticipated. And has already been hinted at, there is a clear method of determining success in business that is objective, whoever makes the most money. So all of the components that have been laid out lend themselves to making sports appealing to fans are present in work as well yet work lacks a following. This implies logically that there are other elements within sports that draw people in and work lacks some of the important ones that will now be detailed.

There are a limited amount of intrinsic values that people have, and it is hopefully not to bold to say that aesthetics is one of them. Humans naturally value what they see to be aesthetically pleasing and sports is seen by many to be beautiful. The beauty has been talked about in a previous chapter, but it is worth pointing out that the beauty of sports has different manifestations. It can be beauty on a small scale, the elegance of doing a simple job perfectly, or it can be beauty on a large scale, multiple different moving pieces working harmoniously. Additionally there is a kind of intellectual beauty that can exist in sports, and the same can exist in business. A deft business deal can be seen as beautiful, but a holistic beauty of the like that can be found in sports is not available in work. That physical beauty is more visceral than any

intellectual kind of beauty. The physical beauty speaks to a more primal part of humans, a part that is often forsaken particularly in modern culture. The connection to a neglected part of people increases the power of that connection because it is generally unfulfilled. People connect to the beauty in sports, and that connection is more intuitive and quickly attained than any connection a person can make with a company.

Companies use logos, slogans and thoughtful advertisement to try and connect to the consumer, but there is a barrier in place that sports breaks through. A company tries to endear itself to the consumer, and if that is effective the consumer will use the product of the company. However that does not lead to the consumer feel compelled by the success or failure of the company because those success and failures do not really relate to the consumers life. Finding a way to cut costs, or gaining more customers is not relatable to the human experience in a way were a person can identify with those gains. Saving money is relatable, but the mechanisms by which that occurs for a company are so complex that it loses that ease of connection. The ease of connection is really important for feeling an identity with the other, because the most powerful form of identification is the unconscious one, the instantaneous combining of oneself with another. Sports does this by both being performed clearly by individuals and secondly by it being easily relatable. The number of people who work at a company, the different ways in which they interact and affect each other is far too complicated to ever allow for the kind of easy intelligibility that sports has. There is a manageable number of players on a team, and the exact ways they interact may not be fully known, the general points can be understood. What also helps sports is the physical nature of it is something that everyone within the physical world can instantly relate to. A person can understand what it is like to try and run very quickly, either by them being able to do so themselves, them not being

able to run quickly, and even if they cannot run they have the deepest kind of appreciation for that ability. There have been numerous studies that show that when a spectator watches sports their brain reacts to the physical motions as if part of them were doing it. The identity connections built in sports are so deeply ingrained in us it is biologically a preconscious occurrence. Fans responses to their teams success and failures are so powerful that it only becomes intelligible if one understands that they feel personally connected to what they see. Sports cannot be simply analyzed by looking at only the player, only the fan, or even those two together. One has to examine both of them as well as humanity as a whole.

The last element that separates sports from work is that it provides an affirmation of human life. How that works out will be explained in the conclusion of this thesis, as it is the fundamental answer to my question that has been driving this work. At the end of this chapter sports has been found again balancing between different worlds, drawing from both but being neither. Sports shares many elements with art that make it compelling. The aesthetics, power of identity, and assertion of the value of humanity can all be found in both art and sports. The difference between the two, the competition, the inability to fully know how an event will turn out, yet the objective value system are the similarities between sports and work. All of this points to an idea that has already been covered, which is that sports speak to human nature. It is not an accident of fate that sports has the place in people's life that it does. It is as important as it is because of the make up of sports intertwining with the make up of people. There is a question in the field of sociology and psychology when it comes to sports, do people imprint the values they have into sports or does sports imprint the values onto people who play them? It seems that the values are within people and sports forces them to the foreground. Sports are only fully intelligible with an appreciation for how humans work, and if one wants to have a deep

understanding of how people work it is important to understand sports. Examinations of how people relate to religion, family, friends, jobs, music, purchasing history and numerous other specifics are looked at when trying to make humanity understandable. Sports is a necessary focus of examination for those who play, watch or even live in a culture of sports. Sports affects even those who care nothing for sports. If it turned out that sports were in the end a negative thing it should be still understood so it would be easier to rid the world of sports. However sports are in the end a positive thus that enhances the need to make sports fathomable.

Conclusion:

The moment of conception for this thesis was June 10th, 2010 when the Boston Celtics beat the Los Angeles Lakers in Game 4 of the NBA Finals. I at the time was a 20 year old college student who had studied philosophy, theology, literature, history, languages, art, the sophisticated components of life. And I was at that moment a stumbling depressed fool due to the poor play of a group of millionaires. I could not understand why I felt so damaged by a game in which the ending had no direct impact upon my life. It made no sense that I could intellectually

tell myself that there were far more important things in the world, yet none of that affected the feeling of loss that consumed me. A week later I was experiencing the exact opposite as the Lakers defeated the Celtics in Game 7 winning the NBA title that year. I had gone from one side of the emotional extreme to the other. I was not alone in this swinging back and forth. My friends, family, random strangers on the street too were moved by what transpired. Of course so too were the players themselves, and while that at first makes more sense, one has to ask what made them pledge their lives to a career that will most likely end before they reach 40 years of age? There were forces at work that were heavily impacting my life and I could not remember when those forces had not been impacting my life. How sports was impacting me and all these other people was unclear to me, and I wanted some kind of answers. The first place to look was at what parts of sports particularly connected with people and what parts had the deepest and longest lasting impact upon people's lives.

I contemplated about three different components that have stuck with me and many others, love, excellence and losing. I felt that it should have a particular focus on how the player is connected to those themes because in sports the players experience so heavily mediates the other kinds. All three topics in sports serve as gateways, windows that face larger truths. Love in sports becomes a model for how an individual can come to interact with the external world, whether that be an actual person or more ethereal forces like an idea or institution. Excellence in sports is a rare opportunity that provides validation, personal acceptance and immense joy. Excellence helps to show what it is that people need to sustain fulfilled lives. And losing shows what each person has to grapple with when the desired outcome is not gained. Losing forces a confrontation with what is uncomfortable, what is difficult and intensely painful. Much of the first chapter was spent dealing with those issues, and mostly with an eye towards the first point

of those experiences, the player. However I knew that I wanted for personal reasons to have a better understanding of how the viewer interacts with sports.

That word viewer pointed me in the direction of other kinds of viewership, and then to tragedy. The three philosophers I examined all give different lens by which one can view sports. Aristotle gives the idea of mimesis, talking about the effect of imitation. Sports imitates elements of life and of special importance is the fact that that imitation can be understood and then analyzed by the spectator. Part of the great joy sports fans get from following sports is feeling they truly understand what they see, even if that is rarely the case. Hegel focuses on how watching two just systems come into conflict with each other, and how that leads to a deepening of self knowledge as well as knowledge of the other. Sports shows how people can be in conflict that is not personal, that both sides can be right in their aims and that is simply a fact one has to come to terms with as it is part of life. Lastly Nietzsche's detailing of the interplay of the Apollinian and Dionysian forces helps set the tone for understanding a lot about sports in that it does not fit neatly into any category. The Apollinian is clearly a force in sports, the rules of it, the clarity of winning and losing. So too is the Dionysian with the moments of transcendent experience, and the losing of any sense of personal identity within a mass.

The final question that stuck with me was why was it that sports has the kind of power it does over those who follow it and nothing else does? I provided only a few of what are likely many reasons that sports affects people the way it does, but all the reasons seem very important. The competition, lack of an ability to fully know and objective value system all help to distinguish sports from something like art. Yet what also ties art together with sports, the aesthetic nature and the ease of identification, are what separate it from anything else that could potentially lead to a serious following for entertainment. It was in trying to determine at least

some of the parts of sports that differentiate it from the other groups that in the end lead me to one of the biggest reasons that I know I will forever be impacted by sports. For those who sports grabs a hold of, whether that be playing or watching, sports is an unequivocal assertion of the value of human life.

There comes a point in life where one examines themselves, those closest to them, and people in general and wonders if there is any value in those three things, and if someone does not have that moment they are doing something wrong. Cynicism, despair, loneliness, confusion, weakness, lethargy, sorrow, and pointlessness come screaming at us from so many different parts of life. There are times where a break from those feelings seems impossible. The value of humanity is questioned, and rightfully so. That people are good is not a given and it is something that has to be ratified over and over again. That declaration of value in humanity can come from many different events in one's life that range from the mundane to the extraordinary. A friend's continued loyalty, the selfless act of a stranger, the bravery of a soldier, all of these moments are a testament to humanity. Sports happen to be a common and powerful affirmation of human life. Sports calls upon the best part of people because it evokes courage, imagination, focus, freedom, harmony, vitality, endurance, loyalty, honesty, self-sacrifice, commitment, and serenity among others. Sports is especially important in the world today because it connects people to the physical material world. It is easy to drift away from the tangible parts of life in the modern world and sports ties us firmly to all the value that comes from our physical forms. Intellectual exercise is highly fulfilling, but it will never complete someone in the kind of way that being absolutely exhausted from playing a sport will. There is a draining on the person that is a reminder of what it is to be alive. The reminder also is brought home by the fragility of our bodies. Sports is one of the few places where people injure themselves in the contemporary

world, and that is a good thing. I personally have a greater understanding of pain, and am better capable of dealing with it because I was continuously hurt while playing a sport, rugby. By being tied to that physical nature sports shows how impressive the human body can be. Seeing another human do some of the things that professional athletes do is awe inducing. The physical element is also an expression of vitality, youth, health and a testament against death and decay. Of course there is also the mental aspect to sports, the intellectual capabilities that too can seem other worldly. Whether it be brilliant planning on behalf of a coach, determination of the highest order, or when multiple options are weighed and a decision is made faster than it seems one could think. The intellectual and mental aspects of sports is again a model for the levels that people can reach. Sports points towards the peaks of humanity, and the fact that it is a construct makes it all the more valuable.

Sports is an example of how a construct can seep into every crevice of our soul and become bound in unbreakable chains. There are so many different illusions that we allow into ourselves, to permeate our lives, and once they are there we are forced to continue with them. Many of them point towards the lows of ourselves or do not point to anything in particular. These different illusions constitute our lives whether it be the construct of money, literature, race, fashion, country or the dozens of other agreed to structures. I wonder, why not embrace another construct, one that can give a metric to determine the value of the other constructs? Sports gives reasons to deal with personal struggles, to overcome difficulty, to connect to others, to continually toil, to enjoy pleasure, and how to get through pain. Sports serves a purpose, it can better lives, and it has the ability to accentuate what is best in humans. That can be a bar that other constructs have to meet if we are to value them. They of course do not have to fill all the same roles as sport, they do not have to help in the same way. But sports gives back positives to

those who engage with it, that requirement is not too much to demand of the illusions people live by.

Life is not explained by sports, one should not simply live for sports, it is a construct that elucidates what is valuable within ourselves and others. We embrace sports because it is an affirmation of the telos of human life. I embrace sports at this point because I have no choice but to, it is with me now and forever, but I know I am glad I have it, and I affirm it because I know it to be a good thing. Sports induces reflection, contemplation, examination, it is a yes saying to how we live, what we live for, and that we indeed do live. If the ultimate imperative in life is to know thyself, then the reason that sports speaks to us is that in the end it speaks about us.

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