



Bellwether

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Sports: Entertainment or Religion?

Irvin Kershner

First Place

Every year, millions of people watch grown men kick an inflated sphere through a metallic rectangle. Every year, millions of people watch grown men toss leather, prolate spheroids to other men and then watch still other men grab and throw those men to the ground. Every year, millions of people watch grown men throw small cork and horsehide spheres at men trying to smack those spheres with rods of ash wood. Deconstructed, these activities sound silly and on the verge of ridiculous. Every year, however, the world spends billions of dollars on what we call sports.

Ever since there have been face paint and team banners, there has existed the remaining sector of society—puzzled at each fan's enthusiasm. From an outside perspective, baseball, American football, and soccer all sound a little silly. If you were to tell someone from the 19th century that in 200 years, some of the richest men in the world would be the ones that throw pointed leather balls, they would laugh. What's even more shocking, however, is the number of diverse, yet committed, fans that flock every year to the football, baseball, and soccer stadia. Nevertheless, despite the apparent absurdity of professional sports in their deconstructed form, the sports fan community gets larger every year. Does this phenomenon of sports fandom have no explanation, or does the answer lie deep within the annals of human history and psychology?

Unsurprisingly, human psychology plays a large role in the cause of obsession with sports. One of these psychological reasons comes from the effect that community has on a person's wellbeing (Almendrala). To understand this concept, a look at history is required. Since 1776, the western world has gone over the edge in a frenzy to embrace the ideology of

individualism and liberty. The United States, for example, was built on the ideals of human independence. When the founding fathers separated themselves from the old world and Britain, they instilled an era characterized by freedom and autonomy. Because of this philosophy, many people today—though independent—are yearning for something with which to connect and identify. Many people have sought to satisfy this desire through sports. In the words of psychology Prof. Daniel Wann of Murray State University, “The simple fact is that people are looking for ways to identify with something, to feel a sense of belonging-ness with a group of like-minded individuals” (qtd. in Almendrala).

For example, when a person is a sports fan of the local baseball team, say the Boston Red Sox, they are surrounded by a community of people that share something in common. If this person dons a Red Sox baseball cap and walks down a street in Boston, they are going to have complete strangers high-five and fist-bump them and maybe even stop to talk about the team (Almendrala). “All these people are going to be your friends and your comrades, even though you don’t know their names, you’ve never seen them before, and you’re probably never going to see them again,” says Wann, “but you feel this important sense of connection to the world around you” (qtd. in, Almendrala). When you boil it down, this kind of attachment is no different from other fan communities. Every person has some sort of community with which they relate; whether you’re a Star Wars fan going to see the next movie, or a farmer going to a farmer’s market, humans have this essential need to relate to something or somebody. Sports fandom does not only connect a fan to others around him, but following a team makes a fan feel like he knows every player and coach and everything about them. A fan watches and reads so much about each player that it seems as if each one is a personal friend that might come over for dinner some time (Bowen).

To get a real grip on the next connection, one must step back and understand the history behind sports and their origins. Since the beginning of time, humans have enjoyed competition. The process of striving and becoming a little better than the next guy has been enjoyed throughout history. Excluding running, the earliest form of organized sport in recorded history is Greco-Roman wrestling introduced to the Olympics in 708 BC (“Wrestling Greco-Roman Equipment and History”), though even earlier allusions to wrestling can be found in ancient Egyptian tombs dating back to 3000 B.C. (Dellinger).

One of the very first organized sports in which onlookers would cheer for a specific team came in the form of chariot racing. In ancient Rome, each team’s chariot was decked in a certain color and then sent to dash around an oval track at high velocities. The speed and danger made the sport even more popular with some fans making “curse tablets” to try to scare rival teams (“Chariot Races”). Chariot racing also became a central part of Roman politics and was used to expel the emotions from the masses that would otherwise be used for protests and riots (“The Circus: Roman Chariot Racing”). The first sport involving a ball was the Mesoamerican ball game that was most likely first played by the Olmecs around 1500 B.C. (Cartwright). The game involved two teams of two to four people, each trying to knock a ten-pound rubber ball through a ring by using only their hips (Cartwright). The game had many religious and ritualistic aspects, with the losers often being sacrificed in the end (Cartwright).

Since then, many other sports involving spheres of some size or shape have been invented. The most popular sports in the US and across the globe were invented in more recent history. Soccer surfaced in England around the middle of the 19th century (“History of Soccer”). Baseball—contrary to popular belief—was formed in the US in the early 1800s from a combination of the games rounders and cricket (“Who Invented Baseball?”). American football

was first played as an adaptation of rugby in 1869 (“Who Invented Football?”), and basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith (“Who Invented Basketball?”). These sports have grown over the years until now their fans count in millions, throughout the US and worldwide. The question once again presents itself: why do these activities seem to garner so much attention?

It is interesting to note every sport previously listed was created in a country during a time of relative peace. Although there were a lot of wars and battles during the Greco-Roman era, were soldiers the spectators at the Olympics? No, it was predominantly rich men from the upper class. Moreover, Roman chariot racing was enjoyed by the masses of ordinary citizens, not by the Roman army (“The Spectators”). There was a lot of warring in Mesoamerica between the tribes, but who participated and watched the ball games? Excavations of Mesoamerican ball pits and cities show that the courts are located near the houses of the rich and well to do, not the lowly peasants and soldiers (Petrus).

All modern sports were created by men in peaceful countries and played and watched by people in countries where battles and skirmishes with other nations were not imminent: soccer, invented and played in 19th century England by ordinary citizens (“History of Soccer”), basketball, played in New York by firefighters and bank clerks, and baseball, along with American football, are watched and enjoyed by people sitting on their couches all across the United States (“Who Invented Baseball?”). All these observations culminate to one conclusion, that sports are a substitute for war.

Think about it. Humans (specifically men) have a natural competitive spirit. In ancient times, war was a constant danger, and being taller, faster, and stronger than the enemy was mandatory. In nomadic tribes, such as the Mongols, fighting off the enemy and raiding weaker

towns was a part of the weekly routine. The ancient Greek cities of Athens and Sparta were constantly in competition of who could gather the biggest army, build the biggest fortifications, or produce the best weapons (“Peloponnesian War”). Just as modern fans wear shirts with their team’s logo or hang up posters, Dark Age knights would wear their clan’s coat of arms and banners on their shields and armor. The many rituals and traditions that fans observe before games is reminiscent of the ceremonies and superstitions that the Native American braves performed before a battle (Tabler).

If you were not a warrior in ancient countries, then you stayed home, supplied the troops with gear and food, cheered them on, and waited patiently to hear of the outcomes of the battles. During the 1600-1800s, being a soldier was a romanticized occupation; it was an honor to go fight for your country. In 1914, all of Europe was itching for an opportunity to prove that their individual country was the most powerful, thus sparking World War I. During World War II, fighter pilots competed with each other to see who could shoot down the most enemy planes. They would even go as far as to tally how many kills they each had by making marks on the outside of their planes after a battle. For a citizen of a peaceful country, sport substitutes war.

The fierce competition and rivalries are not the only things that outsiders have trouble understanding about sports, but the amount of emotion that fans invest into their teams leaves many critics scratching their heads. Historically, a soldier released any competitive emotions, anger, or excitement while on the battlefield. In the US today, however, the biggest battle most men have is with their wives. In today’s western society, men are expected to keep their emotions hidden (Almendra).

When all of these men suppress their feelings, they search for some place where they can unleash their passion and act like who they really are. If you’ve ever been to any sports game,

then you know that the stadia are always filled with screaming, enthusiastic, and passionate fans all yelling excitedly when their team scores and leaving dejectedly when their team loses. Similar to how a tire will pop if it is pumped with too much air, a person under stress with no avenue of expression will also pop. Through cheering for their team, a person can release emotion and energy that would otherwise build up inside them (Almendra).

Another psychological plus that fans enjoy is the ability sports gives them to feel a sense of victory in their normal lives. Because of all the time, money, and emotion that fans spend on their teams, they create an artificial, intimate tie between themselves and the players they watch perform. Because of this connection, when a fan's team wins a game, they feel as if *they* were triumphant even though all they did was stare at the television screen and yell. As psychology professor Ronald F. Levant put it, "Identifying with your sports teams is one of the ways you can vicariously experience success, and in real life, success is hard." The constant drudgery of working a job where accomplishments do not present themselves every day, can depress even the heartiest of men. Cheering for their sports team, however, gives them an escape from the daily grind of life (Balint).

Although many people simply have a casual interest in sports or their favorite team, just like any obsession, some people make sports their life, and their religion. This idea also builds heavily on the idea of community. Just like the members of a religion, the fans of a particular team all have a common "goal" or "belief": either loyalty to a certain deity or to a certain team. The way in which fans decorate their homes with the team logo and wear shirts and hats is similar to the way that others will hang up a cross or put a Buddha statue in their house (Serazio). Humans have a desire to relate to some larger group, to be part of something bigger than themselves. In the past, this desire was often filled by religion, and the local church body. In the

modern age, however, the western culture has moved away from religion and more towards atheism and science. According to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, Christian and religious affiliation is at an all-time low as of 2014 (America's Changing Religious Landscape). This upheaval has caused a mighty gap to form in many people's lives. As a result, the purpose that was once generated by religion and God has been substituted by that of a sports team.

In conclusion, to think that such arbitrary activities such as throwing leather balls can garner so many loyal fans and so much money is mind-boggling. These fans, however, don't heed the absurdities and grow more abundant and passionate every year. Though at first sight it may seem incomprehensible, the phenomenon of sports obsession can be explained through careful observations of human history and psychology. The strong community aspect of sports fandom brings people together that would otherwise have nothing in common. This community feeling also gives people a sense of connection and greater purpose. Sports can also be explained as a substitute for war in countries of peace. Because of the lack of competition and emotion-expelling battles in these countries, the men turned to sports—where they are free to yell for their team without hindrance.

Finally, through both a search for higher purpose and through the community aspect, sports, for many people, becomes a religion. The undeterred dedication to their team, and the adoration that induces banners and logos to be decorated everywhere, all culminates to make professional sports a person's community, clan, and religion. In the words of Sean Durkin, "Sports teams, people who follow sports teams, religion, churches, work - any company, I find that people just generally have a need to belong to something larger than themselves."

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Submitted to Dr. O’Neal, Spring 2017

An Alternative Literacy

Alana Wingate

Second Place

Literacy is defined as the ability to read or write, but I believe literacy is much more complex than that. From my time of learning to read and write, I've had the typical experience. My mom would read to me and teach me how to sound out words. It was not until my brother was born that I understood that literacy can be defined in different ways.

My brother was born with Down's Syndrome; because of this, it's harder for him to understand even the simpler things. When he was born, he was a typical Downs baby; he was cute and bubbly. It wasn't until he was diagnosed with Leukemia at the age of three my family really saw the change. For Leukemia patients, the treatment time differs by gender; because my brother is a boy, his treatment would last for five years. After his first few rounds of chemo, he forgot how to walk or communicate. We had to teach him sign language. During the time he was learning sign language, my whole family was as well.

This was my first glimpse of a different form of literacy. At this point in his life, he was not capable of reading or writing, but his form of literacy was through his hands. Instead of communicating through writing or speaking, my family communicated through motions and gestures. This showed me at a younger age that to be able to speak and to be understood is

necessary. Although our form of literacy was not the book definition, my brother was still literate. He couldn't read or write, but he could communicate.

Communication is key in literacy; it is not just the ability to read words but to read signs and facial expressions. We use facial expressions to see how someone is feeling. We can't read a face like a book, but we can read it through the motions. In order to be literate in my family, all we needed was a pair of hands and a face.

In addition to sign language, we created our own form of literacy as well. When my brother didn't know the sign for a particular word, he would make one up. This shows that he understands that this was his way of communication. To me, this is the most complex form of literacy. Not only did he understand what he needed to do to communicate, he could create his own motions for words. Through these experiences with my brother, I have learned a deeper meaning of literacy.

In my last paper, I described literacy as a complex thing or something a person has when they fully understand a language, but there are different ways of understanding a language. This experience with my brother made me realize that all anyone needs in order to be literate is to understand what they are trying to say and to get that point across in any way possible. Although it may not make sense to people at first, the different ways of communicating to someone may become normalized, and no one will look at it any differently.

Although a person may not be literate in English, they become literate in their own form

of English. The different form of English someone may use will cause him or her to pause and think about what the person said or motioned. This causes for a deeper understanding of literacy. It forces others to think of what you said instead of ignoring it. It makes them use their own understanding of literacy and apply it to what someone is doing or saying. The motions and actions of my brother have made me realize that literacy is past the common book knowledge. It is the way of having your voice being heard and understanding what you need to do to communicate with others that may not understand your particular way of communicating.

Finally, I mentioned before that because my brother has Downs, he has a more difficult time learning things. Once he was in remission, he was able to go back to school when he was six. Other kids at his age were able to complete preschool, but my brother went straight into kindergarten. This caused for another difficult time in learning. When he went back, most of the children he was with could read simple words and understand them; we had just gotten my brother to speak his first word again. While speaking to the teacher, she said that her goal was for my brother to read simple things by the time he was a teenager. For my family, this was not good enough, so after he would get home from school, we would take turns in helping him read and write.

Through this experience, I had to learn quickly how a child with a learning disability could understand what I was trying to say to him. So we taught through pictures, word recognition, and games. At a young age, I became a teacher. Because of this, I now understand

that literacy takes more than a common knowledge of a language; there must be an understanding as to why sentences are formed in the way they are and how to turn it into something simpler to help those who may not understand. I learned at a very young age that to be literate is to communicate.

In conclusion, it doesn't matter if the form of communication a person uses is through a face, hands, or words; as long as someone understands the point being made, you are literate. Because of my experiences with my brother, I now have a deeper knowledge of literacy. It's not one's ability to read a paper or write but to read an expression, hands, or to write feelings through the motions of a face. Literacy is a way of communicating with loved ones and the ability to understand what they are saying through their own "broken" language.

Submitted to Dr. Bost, Fall 2017

Bicyclists vs. Farmers

Callie Craig

Third Place

Gordon County has a vast quantity of outdoor venues to satisfy one's desire to spend time outside. Gordon County and Calhoun City's proposed Rivers to Ridge bicycle trail would provide anyone access to the rural areas of Gordon County. However, farmers cannot afford to open their gates and welcome public access on their land due to dangers that come with it. Gordon County has a wealth of natural resources that would be put at risk due to biosecurity issues or negligence. Rather than place these farmers and their livelihoods at risk, Gordon County and Calhoun City officials must consider altering the proposed course of the bicycle trail.

In March 2014, Marcus Palazzolo, owner of Cherokee Cycles, served as a spokesperson and project planner regarding the creation of an interconnected circuit of trails throughout Calhoun and Gordon County ("Bike Trails Are in the Works for Gordon"). Recently, the Gordon County Government Parks and Recreation department posted a Gordon County Trail Master Plan and held a public meeting on March 28, 2017 to discuss a 20.1-mile trail that will extend through Calhoun and into northern parts of Gordon County ("Gordon County Trail Master Plan"). Marcus Palazzolo's wife, Jackie, is currently serving as a city council member for Calhoun, Georgia. Jackie is also serving on the zoning advisory board which reviews annexation and variance requests and other zoning items in relation to the city's long range growth plans. ("Community Development").

As owners of a Cherokee Cycles, the Palazzolos will likely have significant financial gains as a result of the bicycle trails. Jackie's financial dependence upon the bicycle shop likely causes a conflict of interest or some bias in regard to her influence as a council member and as a member of the zoning advisory board.

While the Palazzolos and other bicycling or walking enthusiasts envision great benefits from the bicycle trail, some farmers foresee adverse outcomes. Three Hundred and fifty acres bordering the Oostanaula River has been in the Craig family for five



generations and can be traced back to Lizzie Hill and Lyman R Craig, via Lizzie's will that was recorded on June 16, 1927. ("Gordon County Trail Master Plan"). The proposed River to Ridge trail is projected to cross this acreage,

South West of the Oostanaula River. In the adjacent image, taken from the Gordon County Trail Master Plan link posted on the Gordoncounty.gov website, the Craig property is the center tract with the dotted lines running through them. The dotted line represents the trail, and the wider strip represents the Oostanaula River.

The fifth amendment from the U.S. Constitution both establishes governmental authority in appropriating private property and sets boundaries for their use of eminent domain in the taking of private property (Mas 370). The amendment, in part, states "...nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." The

term “just compensation” leaves room for debate. Most local, state, and federal entities only offer fair market value for the land (Macia 946). The absence of a precise formula for determining just compensation leads to frequent litigation (“Elements of Eminent Domain”). Although multiple Supreme Court Justices have voiced under-compensation concerns regarding property owners, no progress has been made in finding a feasible way to estimate the difference between an owner’s subject valuation and the fair market. Which leaves many land owners bearing the cost of the difference (Macia 948).

The waterfront issue further complicated the estimated value. The shaded area on the above image indicates areas of land that are in a flood plain. One can see that the majority of the land lies within a flood plain (“Gordon County Trail Master Plan”). The indicated risk of flood diminishes the value of each tract. However, additional compensation is usually required for land that is changed from a water front to inland acreage due to the loss of the access to the waterfront (“Elements of Eminent Domain”).

The northernmost tract shown on the image above is owned by poultry producers while the other tracts are utilized for grazing cattle, horses, growing hay, and producing sod. The proposed trail will bring potential risks to these farmers and their livestock. These risks can be passed on to other farms or down to consumers in our area, as these farms produce beef that is marketed locally. It is in the best interest of all Gordon County residents who enjoy beef to question the biosecurity of these farms. Rock stated it well, “If you don’t know how the ground beef you eat was raised, you may be putting yourself at higher risk of illness from dangerous bacteria. You okay with that?” (26).

The Gordon County census from 2012 says that residents benefit from the fact that Gordon County is ranked second in the state and 126th in the US for livestock

production. Gordon County is ranked 3rd in the state and 362nd in agricultural production, third in the state in hay and forage production, and first in the state in canola production. These statistics from the 2012 agriculture census indicated that Gordon County residents should be aware of where their beef and poultry is produced (Gordon County Census).

The Departments of Agriculture at the state and national level have vamped up efforts and security measures that will ensure safety to herds, flocks, and those who consume the meat they yield. The United States Department of Agriculture has begun issuing premise identification numbers to farms to upgrade traceability in meat animals (National Animal Identification System). The traceability or identification requirements are being applied to cattle, bison, sheep, goats, swine, horses, other equines, captive deer and elk, and poultry (National Animal Identification System). In addition to the traceability measures, the following are some of the measures that the Georgia Department of Agriculture encourages livestock producers to use to protect their livestock from diseases and deliberate tampering:

“Label lots, pastures, barns, and all other facilities,
Map facilities and indicating traffic patterns,
Clean and disinfect all equipment and clothing before allowing entrance.”

(Department of Agriculture 1, 2).

The trail is just one example of how biosecurity can become a concern for farmers; it could also become a concern to the public if the trail is to come through farms. Some diseases found in livestock is contagious to humans. Avian Influenza can be passed from poultry to humans and vice versa. As a result of recent outbreaks of Avian Influenza, the University of Georgia Extension Services encourages poultry producers to

keep visitors to a minimum, as they can carry microorganisms on their shoes, clothing, or pets. Extension Specialists Dan Cunningham, and Brian Fairchild state: “Human transportation of microorganisms is one of the more serious threats to biosecurity. Restriction of unnecessary human traffic is a major component of a sound program, Growers should restrict visitors and make sure that any visitor to their farm has a good reason to be there” (1).

Gordon County is home to other farms and agritourism venues that are open to the public for sightseeing and educational opportunities, that can easily be taken away due to the public already getting the chance to see the livestock, etc. they could see for free due to the trail coming through areas in Gordon County. These farms do not raise meat animals and do not have large scale production facilities that would be endangered by public access (“Attractions”). Payne attraction farms grow produce, have a petting zoo, and host festivals, farm tours and special events. Little Red Barn Mobile Petting Farm is available to take small animals to events, parties, and educational programs (Horton). Copper Creek has corn mazes, chickens, ponies, goats, and rabbits, and hosts festivals, field trips, weddings, and parties.

Gordon County has three historical sites or state parks that will appeal to outdoor enthusiasts who would like to spend time outdoors while learning about local history. The Resaca Battlefield is 483 acres in size and has 6 miles of walking trails (“Hours of Operation”). The Fort Wayne Civil War Historic Site is 65 acres in size and has a one-mile walking trail (“Fort Wayne Civil War Historic Site”). The best known historical site is the New Echota Cherokee Capital State Historic Site. New Echota is 200 acres with an unspecified number of walking trails (“New Echota Historic Site”)

Finally, Gordon County has three large parks for recreational activities ranging from walking, bicycling, to team sports, tennis, and swimming. The Sonoraville Recreation Complex is a 79-acre athletic complex with a football, or soccer, field, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, tennis courts, baseball and softball fields, playgrounds and pavilions (“Parks and Recreation”). Salacoa Creek Park is 364-acre recreational area with a 126-acre lake, playgrounds, pavilions, john boat rentals, and a 1.5-mile nature trail (“Salacoa Creek Park”). The Harold “Ooky” Faith Memorial Park is a 1.5-mile lighted asphalt walking trail. Brookshire Park is an 8.5-acre park with a public boat ramp. The Calhoun Recreation Department is a recreational park made up of several acres with a bicycling and walking trail, playgrounds, tennis courts, indoor and outdoor basketball goals, a swimming pool, with a creek running through the center of it (“Parks and Recreation”).

The farmers of Gordon County are not likely to be opposed to building a trail in city limits or where the public already has access. These farmers simply do not want to suffer the adverse outcomes the trail will bring to their farms. First, the money offered for the taking of, or the public access to, the land will likely not be near the subjective value that the farmers deem appropriate, based upon years of toiling upon and investing in their precious acreage by themselves and the ancestors who passed it down to them. Gordon County’s farmers take a great deal of pride in their land but not to the point that they are willing to place their livelihoods or livestock at risk for public access or others’ unvested entertainment. Furthermore, there are other agritourism venues that would benefit financially from public access to their farms; there are also greenspaces, parks and

historical sites to provide entertainment and lovely sites for all types of outdoor enthusiasts.

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