

Are Sports Still Sporting?

AS I WRITE THIS EDITORIAL, preparations for the 2016 Summer Olympics are in full swing in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This international competition seems likely to be a big success, with 206 countries expected to participate in the first games ever to be played in South America. The 2012 Summer Games in London, England, and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, were artistic triumphs. The popularity of sports worldwide continues to rise. But while sports may look good on the surface, problems lurk underneath. For one thing, there's a vast overemphasis on fame and the worshipping of famous athletes. Then there's the increasingly large role money is playing in sports today, since there are ever-increasing possibilities for product endorsement by athletes. Finally, sports violence has certainly not diminished. In April of 2013, for example, a coach in an amateur soccer game in Salt Lake City was punched in the face by a player because he had penalized that player. The coach later died from the injury. What is wrong? I've concluded that the whole sports scene is in need of repair and have identified three major excesses:

FIRST EXCESS: Misplaced focus on fame. When the Olympics began about 2,700 years ago in Greece, the contests were derived from war. The javelin throw, for example, paralleled the throwing of a spear in a battle. Running paralleled the physical exertion you might have to make if an enemy was chasing you. When the modern Olympic games started in 1896, the philosophy had shifted to the promotion of peace. However, emphasis was still placed on demonstrating physical stamina¹ and excellence in challenging contests. How things have changed! Although athletes still try to achieve their personal best, the focus has shifted to the breaking of records and the achievement of fame. Can we really say that someone who finishes the 400-meter freestyle swim one-tenth of a second ahead of his or her nearest rival is a champion, while that rival is an also-ran?²⁹

SECOND EXCESS: Money. Consider the cost of attending a major athletic competition. In the United States, the average cost of a ticket to a National Football League game in 2015 was about \$84. If you add up the cost of taking a family of four to a game, the total was over \$440. A ticket to an NBA basketball game is about \$52. Baseball is cheaper, though it's not really a bargain at an average ticket cost of about \$30. I wondered why tickets are so expensive until I remembered the key factor: players' salaries. NBA basketball star LeBron James earns about \$25 million a year. Baseball player Alex Rodriguez made about \$22 million in 2015. Is anyone worth that much money? Meanwhile, the president of the United States earns \$400,000 a year, and U.S. public schoolteachers make a median yearly salary of about \$53,000. We can infer a lot about what we value by looking at what we pay people. When we compensate professional athletes so highly, are we rewarding the people who are truly valuable to society?

THIRD EXCESS: Prevalence of violence. We see it wherever we look, and it's certainly not decreasing. Fights occur frequently in professional sports, with ice hockey one of the worst offenders. In one of the best-known cases, for instance, NHL player Steve Moore had to be hospitalized because another player hit him in the head with his hockey stick. Unfortunately, there seems to be increasing acceptance of violence as "just part of the game." But once we assume violence is inevitable, it will be almost impossible to stop. This sort of thing doesn't just happen in North America. We've all heard about the well-publicized violence surrounding soccer games in Europe. In another example that occurred in December of 2012, a Dutch amateur linesman was beaten to death after a youth match concluded.

Sports have enormous potential to benefit society, but somehow, in becoming big business entertainment, they have gone awry. What to do? Well, we can pay more attention to local athletics and events such as the Special Olympics. We can refuse to pay ridiculously high ticket prices. We can demand an end to violence. Above all, we need to get back to this idea: It's not whether you win or lose; it's how you play the game.



LeBron
James



LeBron
James

1 **stamina**: strength of body or mind to fight tiredness, illness, etc
2 **also-ran**: a loser in a competition

2 *also-ran*: a loser in a competition

AFTER YOU READ

A VOCABULARY Complete the definitions with words from the box.

awry derive factor infer lurk parallel prevalence shift

1. When you take something from an original source, you _____ it from that source.
2. When something changes in practice or position, it is said to _____.
3. To wait somewhere secretly is to _____.
4. Something that matches another situation is said to _____ it.
5. The common, general, or wide existence of something is termed _____.
6. An element, part, or ingredient of something is termed a(n) _____.
7. To _____ something is to deduce or draw a conclusion.
8. Something that has not happened the way it was planned is said to have gone _____.

B COMPREHENSION Complete the sentences. Circle the correct answers.

C **DISCUSSION** Work with a partner. Discuss: Do you agree or disagree with the author of the editorial about the excesses of sports? Give reasons for your answer.