Rational Amateurs: Excellence and Authenticity

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In the following I argue for a rehabilitation of our concepts of excellence and of amateurism in sport. Excellence is a central goal of sport, but *what* excellence and *how* it is measured needs stronger interrogation. In the second part of the paper I revisit the largely discredited (and commonly misunderstood) 19th Century ideal of amateurism and argue that, while deeply flawed, it may give us a basis for reconfiguring and democratising sport away from the degraded form of elitism it now embraces.

I: Measuring Excellence

The Pursuit of Excellence

Sport can be defined in a number of different ways. One of the more strenuous definitions is that to be engaged in sport is to be engaged in the pursuit of excellence. A principle difficulty with this definition is that it is incomplete and making sensible use of it requires that we be more specific as to what it is in sport that is expected to be excellent. There are broader and narrower ways of defining sport excellence and thus broader and narrower ways of construing the point of engaging in sport at all. Thus, in considering only relatively narrow conceptions, we can ask: is excellence in sport a matter of excellence in the physical movements and activities constitutive of a given sport, or excellence in producing wins, points, goals, or whatever is the objective result of the use of those physical skills? Is it the *activity* of sport that matters or the *result*?[1] It would seem that these ought to be equivalent terms: who is most skillful in the sport wins most often, but in reality these are not always the same.[2] If excellence is determined by results, then it would seem not to matter how that result is achieved so long as it is (and so long as doing so does not violate the constitutive

[1]We can and often should distinguish between results and the movement skills that might be expected to lead to results; excellence in kinetic skill is of considerable importance to the quantifying, result-orientated, side of the excellence divide because superior kinetic skill does have a relation to quantifiable success. Movement is also a central element in an experience based conception of sport activity, however, and so kinetic skill acquisition can also be strongly relevant to broader conceptions of excellence as well.

[2]See, for example, Dixon (1999).

rules of the sport in question, or at least not detectably so).

The dominant ideology of excellence in sport today is competitive and quantitative. Simply, the "best" player, athlete, or team is the one that scores the most points, wins the most medals or championships, sets the current world record, etc. The answer to the question "how good are you?" is provided by a set of statistics detailing what one has won, where, and how often. A narrow definition of the "pursuit of excellence" in sport can thus be characterised as something like the following:

> *The pursuit of sport excellence is the attempt to achieve the highest level of skill/endurance/strength/speed (or other, as appropriate) in the exercise of a particular motion or set of motions, defined as appropriate by the constitutive rules of a given sport.*

Thus, running a particular distance, swimming with a particular stroke, striking or throwing a ball of such a size, composition, etc., or in the case of games, executing a specific set of bodily sequences alone or in concert with others, leading to or aiming at a particular constitutively defined end, normally, a superior tally of points scored.

There are a number of considerations that can be adduced in favour of the position that sport excellence should not be assessed in terms of quantitative accumulation alone. In fact, I would argue that a quantitative paradigm of excellence in sport is irrational and destructive. What we think counts as excellence in sport depends heavily on what we think sport is for; the one is the sign of the other. Emphasis on the quantitative tells us what is valued in sport: not the participant, but what the participant does; the participant is the fungible; if another gives us the quantitatively better result, we discard the "lesser" one.

An important key to thinking about sport as a practice of qualitative importance to human beings, and specifically human agents, is the capacity for failure. Humans can, of course, fail mechanically and sport offers a multitude of such options, and an emphasis on a quantitative result offers many more such opportunities insofar as it encourages discarding competitors once they are damaged. But it is not simply because human beings are subject to mechanical failure that sport is a compelling activity.

Play, Self, and Autonomy

Sport is serious *play*. As play, it is also a kind of pretending. This is familiar from when we enliven a dull but necessary task by making a game of it. At a more profound level, playing involves entering a hypothetical world where it matters if one performs certain activities and that ceases to exist when time is up or when the task is completed. As such, play is also of significant benefit for the exploration, trial, and development of the player. It is a realm where we learn who we are, what it is like to be us, and what we would be like if we did this instead of that. In short, play in sport is like play in theatre: an exploration and hypothetical expression

and construction of human being, of selfhood.

Sport is also *serious* play. Sport, like other kinds of play (such as theatre or music) is an activity that embodies a fundamental tension: you can't do it properly unless you take it seriously, just as you aren't doing it if you don't grasp its boundaries. Sport has to be taken seriously; it is played, not played-at; if you don't give it your best you are letting down yourself, your opponent, and the sport-convention itself. And yet it is still play, a provisional world, one that need not exist and that will cease to exist once the final whistle blows or the last runner crosses the line. This tension in sport is constantly at risk and presents a challenge to the one who takes it seriously, that is, to take it just seriously enough and to know when is too much. Insofar as play is a form of spontaneous (albeit trained) expression, sport-play is a vehicle of self-expression and self-development. To fulfill the possibilities for self that this presents requires that the activity or at least some part of it be authentically chosen.

Elite high performance sport is, relatively speaking, inauthentic play. Why this matters, apart from any value we might place on authenticity itself, is because of the role of authentic play in the development of responsible agency. If play is a way of coming to know or create oneself, a way of clarifying self-awareness, it is also a valuable element in an individual's moral education, chiefly in developing the awareness of oneself as a locus of agency: that one can act in relation to others as well as be affected by them, that one's actions have consequences for oneself and others. Thus, play with others can provide a context within which the individual becomes aware of her capacity for responsible agency, and a number of different ways in which this might play out, and without awareness of this capacity she cannot become an autonomous moral agent.

Sport is not alone in providing such contexts, though it has the virtue of presenting a pretensive world, in which situations, as hypothetical or conditional, are less socially costly than in "the real world". Possibilities can thus be explored with fewer or less dramatic repercussions. Yet, this advantage is also a disadvantage: transgressions can be written off that arguably ought not ("I didn't really mean it", "I was going for the ball/puck", "he's not that type of player", etc.). In fact, what we seem to find disproportionately represented in high performance sport is a lack of awareness of agency and responsibility by certain of its practitioners. Professional sports stars are frequently notorious for behaviour that suggests a failure to grasp that they might be held to account for their actions. This is a danger of full-time play: that one never wholly leaves the hypothetical world for the one for which it is only conditional. In such a case, the self is never authentic but always an experiment, is never autonomous both in its lack of responsibility and, in the case of elite sport, in the circumstance that all this playing at self is not for itself, but for another.

Organised sport of any kind removes a certain amount of control from the individuals engaged in it as individuals, perhaps inevitably, or else there could not be organised sport at all; this is so that it is not subject to the arbitrary preferences of any one participant but follows

standard rules and procedures that treat all equally. Elite sport is more strictly governed than novice children's games and participants (or their guardians) accept greater restrictions on their agency as individuals, such as diet, daily schedule, where to live, whether and what kind of education, what if any leisure, etc., presumably because as the athlete progresses there is progressively more at stake. What that "more" is that is "at stake" is an interesting question. For any athlete or player, there is the opportunity for continuing performance, and continuing progress in performance. For professional sport, there is also money and prestige; for elite amateur sport there is prestige and some money, but more likely more debt. But the pursuit of cash is not in itself a sufficiently plausible explanation for the pursuit of fundamentally destructive lifestyles by professional and other elite athletes, not only because of the scant financial reward available to the majority of such athletes but also because of the considerable personal cost for so many.

Harry Frankfurt's analysis of "volitional necessity" may be instructive here. As he remarks, "caring, insofar as it consists in guiding oneself along a distinctive course or in a particular manner, presupposes both agency and consciousness. It is a matter of being active in a certain way, and the activity is essentially a reflective one" (Frankfurt, 83). The necessity then encountered by the caring individual is not a matter of involuntary impulse but a conviction that all other alternatives are unthinkable; thus, it is not a matter of power but of will. Not pursuing the alternate course is not a matter of not being able to do so in the ordinary way of things, but one "gives in" to necessity "because he is unwilling to oppose it and because...his unwillingness is itself something which he is unwilling to alter" (Frankfurt, 87).

In other words, one cares about something, say mountaineering or hockey, deeply enough to be willing to undergo whatever hardships might be necessary in order to experience whatever joys the activity might also bestow, and thereby identifies oneself with that activity so that one can see no reasonable alternative to participating in it. Such a stance, we would have to say, is a paradigm of deep caring for something, even though most who care nothing for sport would also regard its object as trivial and inappropriate for such devotion. This, though, brings us to a crucial point. Note Frankfurt's emphasis on agency and reflective consciousness. There is a considerable difference between Frankfurt's example of Luther setting his course against the established Church and that of a 12 year old gymnast, a 15 year old high school football player, or even the aging professional, who can choose nothing else because he knows of nothing else to choose. Moreover, Frankfurt himself calls attention to the circumstance that it is important not only to care deeply, but "if anything is worth caring about, then it must be worth caring about what to care about" (Frankfurt, 92). Simply, it seems reasonable to observe that, someone’s caring wholeheartedly about a thing is not by itself a justification for doing so. Insofar, then, as the high performance athlete's "choices" are inauthentic, i.e., insofar as they do not issue out of a free choice of being (as the mountaineer's does, ex hypothesi) but as the inevitability of a being in bad faith, the strength of conviction is

insufficient for validation.[3]

Consequently, it is not clear that the devotion to organised, especially high performance sport is sufficiently explained in Frankfurtian terms. Rather, there are mechanisms at work here that constrain and distort the athlete's sense of what is willed. Athletes are not only trained to perform certain physical motions; they are trained to *be athletes* or *players*, and this includes learning a set of expectations and responses. Athletes learn a willingness to be treated in ways that most of us would not tolerate; they learn an acceptance of pain and the possibility, indeed the likelihood, of injury; they learn to accept sitting on the bench for years in the hope of one day getting to play on the first team.[4] Any normal person would walk away from what elite athletes put up with on a regular basis, to say nothing of how some may be subjected to abuses they endure or even think justified. Why would anyone do it?

Modern high performance sport demands a commitment that amounts to total identification, an identification that absorbs the whole of the high performance athlete's existence and self-understanding. "Who are you?" "I am a hockey/football/basketball player, a rower, skier, swimmer, sprinter, etc."[5] Success in sport of any kind requires a degree of commitment. Sport is also an important element in the development of self-identity for those who participate in it and become committed to it. None of this should be worrying or

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[3]See, for example, André Agassi's admission that he hated tennis, in Stuart Jeffries, "Why Did André Agassi hate tennis?" http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2009/oct/29/andre-agassi-hate-tennis (retrieved 28 October 2009). As Jeffries continues: "British cyclists Chris Boardman, the former Olympic pursuit champion, and Tour de France star David Millar have both admitted to not really liking cycling....Olympic gold-winning track cyclist Victoria Pendleton gave an insight into this in a brutally frank Guardian interview after winning gold at Beijing last year. 'I was an emotional wreck beforehand,' she admitted. 'I worried that I would be the one person who let down the team. So winning was just a relief. And even that felt like a complete anti-climax. It was very surreal on the podium and as soon as I stepped off it I was, like, "What on earth am I going to do now?" I found it quite hard to deal with. It was, like, I've got no purpose any more.'

"But it is her answer to the question of how to get out of this psychic void that is most telling: 'I soon worked out that the only thing I could do was to get another gold medal. I need one. If 2012 goes to plan, winning the Olympics on my home turf, I might finally feel I've achieved the ultimate for me.'"

[4]See Ryall (2008).

[5]Jeff Christie, Canadian luger: "I have been sliding for 15 years. It is in my blood, it is who I am and it is what I choose to do. To get back on the track, that is all I want to do." Quoted in http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/blog/2010/feb/14/luge-vancouver-nodar-kumaritashvili-winter-olympics/print (retrieved 21/2/2010).

problematic. However, it is also true that elite sport often exerts a demand for a stronger commitment, a more decisive identification. The demand is placed upon players and athletes to justify the expenditure of time, effort, money, and advertising that is put into their careers, and the only justification that will do is the production of results. The tyranny of result-production demands in its turn a commitment on the part of the athlete to identify completely with this project. In short, it is a central and characteristic fault of high performance sport that it removes the normal rational encumbrances on the practice of sport, those limits that would tell most of us: "that's enough".

Totalising identification facilitates the disappropriation of the athlete's body and decision-making processes. Thus, contra Frankfurt, the athlete is not in the position of Luther. It is true that the athlete is ultimately responsible for this condition; insofar as it is bad faith it is something for which one is oneself, in the end, accountable. It is, however, undeniable that there is a great deal of pressure on elite and would-be elite athletes to acquiesce to total identification with their sport, and we should not forget that elite athletes do not usually come to their sports as fully formed adults but are inculcated in them from a young age. In many cases, perhaps most, this is a pressure placed upon children who have yet to develop the sense of autonomous selfhood required to respond to such pressures.

As argued earlier, sport, as a form of serious play, offers a realm of expression that, at least ideally, constitutes an affirmation of agency, responsibility, and creativity of self that is a defining element of any person's wider life and experience. Sport is a way of discovering and developing the *whole* human being: bodily expression is one vital component of a complete human self, and sport has enormous potential in this regard. High performance sport as it is performed and managed to a large degree inhibits or prevents this *insofar as* it concentrates the individual within one aspect of their existence, narrowing down possibility and expression. This threatens to make sport an irrational choice in that what should be a flourishing of possibility is made into its constriction and even its denial.

These claims need to be qualified, however. I am not arguing that one should resist any choice that narrows the options before one as this would be an irrational principle guaranteeing non-action. It is trivially the case that any choice narrows the (immediate) field of choice in the sense that if I must choose between *a* and *b*, and if only *a* will lead to a_1 and only *b* to b_1, then choosing *b* entails that I will no longer have the possibility of choosing *a*. That does not mean, however, that I have cheated myself of possibilities that were once open to me, as choosing *b* leads me to various possibilities I would not have had if I had chosen *a*, and choosing neither leaves me with no useful possibilities at all. Of course, some decision paths may generate more objectively bad outcomes than others and some may lead to relative deserts of practical possibility. It might be better in some respects to avoid these. I am nevertheless inclined to admit that one might rationally choose dangerous activities; that is, depending upon one's goals and one's options, any particular activity may be a, even the only, rational choice. It might well be rational to take on the high performance sport identity where,

for example, it is the only way out of grinding poverty and crime. Moreover, it strikes me as eminently reasonable for a given individual to seek out activities that most of us would find inexplicably dangerous and stressful (mountain-climbing, BASE-jumping, solo round-the-world sailing, etc.) where that individual would be utterly miserable, finding no joy in life, unless they took on these pursuits.[6] These are, despite possible appearances to some, rational choices. The question is, however, whether the ordinary high performance athlete's position is of this sort.

II: Amateurism

The Amateur Ideal

Among the wider consequences of the commoditised high performance approach to sport is the trivialisation of all non-elite sport. As long as we view only high performance sport as real sport and high performance athletes as real athletes, we devalue all other sport and all other sport participation. In practical terms, if all our resources go to high performance and professional sport, we starve out truly amateur sport, at both the local and wider level. That this is socially harmful ought to be obvious, given the decline in health and basic physical fitness of the population in those nations that invest heavily in high performance sport, but this devaluation is an attitude that has bad consequences for sport in general. In seeing only professional and elite sport as sport proper rather than mere recreation, we excuse ourselves from it–it is something for other people, something we buy rather than do. Having paid good money for our sport, we expect value: we demand self-sacrifice and total identification from "our" athletes. And next to their commitment and sacrifice, our own efforts, if we make them at all, are trivial. If we accord meaning only to commodity-sport, we render amateur sport (so-called "recreational" or "participation" sport) meaningless, despite the fact that this is where serious play can still occur, play that creates human meaning for the player. There is clearly a need to reverse this trend and revalorise amateur sport.

Old School Amateurs

There is a scene in the movie Chariots of Fire that points quite nicely to the problem at hand. Harold Abrahams[7] is berated by the Masters of Trinity and Caius Colleges, Cambridge, for employing a professional coach and devoting himself entirely to training for a full year. A

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[6]Supposing, obviously, that there are no other overriding considerations why they should not, such as the pursuit causing direct harm to others or environmental destruction.

[7]Note that in this discussion I am referring to the character portrayed in the film; the real Harold Abrahams may well have had different views than attributed to him by me or the scriptwriters.

movie is not a philosophical text, but what we are presumably meant to see in this scene is a fundamental conflict between an outmoded and slightly ridiculous ideal of amateurism derived from the Victorian era and the forward-thinking, progressive, rational, and above all competitive approach to sport exemplified by Abrahams, who has the temerity to challenge the establishment with his desire to win and his willingness to train with a professional coach in order to do so.

The reference to *Chariots of Fire* is apposite because in its ambivalence toward amateurism it rehearses a number of well entrenched misrepresentations. The most outstanding of these is the supposed incompatibility between amateurism and excellence, which is given voice by the character of Abrahams who, having been (apparently) accused of letting down his university and his class by employing a professional, not only equates excellence with professionalism ("What else would he be? He is the best"), but declares "I believe in the pursuit of excellence and I'll carry the future with me." Old-fashioned amateurs, we are to conclude, would rather lose than do their utmost to win, especially if that means employing modern, rational, training techniques in order to do so. Thus we are persuaded, once again, that Victorian-style amateurism is the pursuit of mediocrity; excellence is won through single-minded, professionally facilitated training, at the expense of all else–except, of course, the rules.

The problem with this picture is that it is untrue to the reality of Victorian amateur sport, in ideal and in practice. In fact, in his exchange with the Master of Caius, Abrahams actually gives a clear expression of exactly that historical ideal. If we could suppose this dialogue to be historically and philosophically accurate, the real bone of contention is Abrahams' having taken a year to do nothing but train–this does violate the Victorian amateur separation of work and leisure: sport should not be one's work. Although he is not paid to train (he is not a paid professional in this sense), his approach is "professional" in the sense that he approaches training as a job–he's not playing any more. Abrahams perceives, perhaps rightly, that no other approach is reasonable if one is to compete against the "shamateurs" of the USA, who are depicted as positively industrial in their training and coaching, and whose athletes, through the support offered by the American university and college scholarship system, had for some decades utterly transgressed amateur ideals as they were understood in Britain.[8]

That said, let's look at what the Victorian originators of amateurism really did think and do. Probably the earliest explicit formulation of amateurism is the statement of a committee of London boat clubs from 1878, which defines an amateur as follows:

> "'...an officer of Her Majesty's Army or Navy, or Civil Services, a member of the

[8]See Allison, 19.

> Liberal Professions, or of the Universities or Public Schools, or of any established boat or rowing club not containing mechanics or professionals...[He] must not have competed in any competition, for either a stake or money, or entrance fee, or with or against a professional for any prize; nor ever taught, pursued, or assisted in the pursuit of athletic exercises of any kind as a means of livelihood, nor have ever been employed in or about boats, or in manual labour; nor be a mechanic, artisan or labourer." (Allison, 174)

The second half of this statement covers the central points of subsequent formulations, although it also addresses the particular concerns of the amateur rowing clubs, namely the exclusion of "mechanics", i.e., professional boatmen, but the main points can be still be seen in the Lawn Tennis Association's definition of "amateur" in 1911, cited by Jeffrys: "A player who 'does not receive, or has not received...directly or indirectly, pecuniary advantage by the playing, teaching, demonstrating or pursuit of the game.'" As Jeffrys further explains, "amateurs were prohibited from playing for prize money or wagers; from playing in matches or demonstrations against professionals; selling any prizes won; contributing to the press about involvement in matches except with express permission; or receiving any expenses beyond a bare minimum." (Jeffreys 1, 2240-2241)

As much as the just cited definitions reject playing for financial reward, the reality of sport in the Victorian period is that amateurs as well as professionals competed for prize money, though amateur prizes were normally in the form of objects, such as fancy clocks, for example, that were commonly cashed in (Huggins, 60), or expenses that might be grotesquely inflated (cricket in general and W.G. Grace in particular were noteworthy in this regard) (Huggins, 182-3; Allison, 23). Testimonials could also net the honouree smaller or larger sums (Huggins, 130-3). In fact, amateur sportsmen of the time might well "earn" more than their professional equivalents (Allison, 23). Monetary compensation, then, was not really the issue. Moreover, in many instances, amateurs and professionals played both with and against each other (Huggins, 57, 61). There were regional differences concerning the exclusion of professionals, the North being more accommodating in this regard than the South, but the exclusionary practices of amateur sport seem to have had less to do whether someone received financial reward from sport than whether they engaged in a paid occupation upon which they depended for their livelihood, which was not that of a "gentleman", i.e., if they were a "tradesman" or "mechanic", and which was perceived as giving them a significant physical sport advantage. In short, the issue wasn't payment, so much as class.

It is undeniable that there was a class imperative operating behind much of the propaganda of amateurism. Amateur clubs were able to enforce a class exclusionism by maintaining fee structures and membership requirements that simply could not be met by working class sportsmen, and blackballing any that might somehow squeeze through the net. Social conditions made such exclusions unremarkable. Love, for example, describes the different classes of swimming facilities to which each class might aspire, cleaner water and

larger (racing) dimensions preserved for those higher up the social ladder (Love, 615-6).[9] Competition, however, was an important driving element in the development of sport, amateur or professional, in the early part of this period. Most sports were played as local variants–there were no common rules. Amateur sporting organisations developed at least in part to regularise sports so that competition could take place fairly, and this required common rules and some oversight of fair participation. This included an attempt to mitigate to some degree (a very small degree by our standards) the amount of violence tolerated, to encourage participation, and to get a handle on gambling and other kinds of profit-making (Holt; quoted also in Allison, 174-5). This to some degree helps to explain the exclusion of "professionals" in sports such as rowing: amateurs, it was thought, really could not compete with much hope of success against those whose daily occupation gave them a physical and technical advantage (Blackledge, 39).

There were, however, other, less sporting, motivations involved. For example, the objection was sometimes voiced that the lower classes ("tradesmen") might not share the same moral code about playing and sportsmanship, especially if money was involved; they would be more likely to engage in gamesmanship, violence, or other "sharp practice" in order to win, either because they owed to another their place on the pitch or because they simply did not share the same moral values. This nicely overlooked the degree of violence, gamesmanship, and sharp practice engaged in by bona fide middle class amateurs (W.G. Grace is, again, a convenient example).[10]

If anything marks the practice of amateurism in the Victorian period it is inconsistency. In some cases, rules were made, it seems, to be applied strictly against some and to be overlooked for others,[11] and in many cases it was simply a matter of different clubs and sport associations adopting differing rules and practices (Huggins, 59-61). However, an important element in Victorian amateurist ideology centred in the distinction between leisure and work, and this is, as I have suggested, the real nub of the issue between Abrahams and the Old Boys.

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[9]C. Love. "Social Class and the Swimming World: Amateurs and Professionals." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, 5 (2007): 603-619.
"In 1906 Alfred W.S. Cross, a noted architect of the period, produced his own handbook on the design of public baths and washhouses. [46] He recommended that there should be at least two swimming pools in any public bath facility, one for first-class use and one for second-class use. If no provision could be made for a women's bath, then time should be set aside for women's use of the other baths as appropriate. He recommended that the first-class swimming pool should measure 100 feet by 40 feet to best conform to standard racing distances. The second-class and women's baths, should they exist, need not be this size. He suggested that a second-class bath need only be 75 feet by 35 feet, and a women's bath 60 feet by 30 feet."

[10]See Huggins, 35, 51, 57, 63, 76, 182-3.

[11]See Huggins, 182-3.

The idea is clearly that sport is play, not work, and that the greatest danger is in confusing the two. Whether it was Protestant work ethic or capitalist ideology, a common middle class view was that "'the right to play is the reward of work'", or, as RFU president Arthur Budd put it, if a man "'cannot afford the leisure to play the game he must do without it'" (Huggins, 58; Blackledge 45).[12] Of course, such a principle has the effect of restricting working class participation in sport.[13]

One of the classic (mis)representations of amateurism, which gets a predictable airing in *Chariots of Fire*, is that the Victorian amateur ideal entails a relative indifference to winning in favour of simply "playing the game". It is this assumption that makes amateurism seem like a defeatist cult of mediocrity. This walks like a canard, quacks like a canard, and it is a canard. The character building that was at stake in Victorian sport was the willingness to push on, despite fatigue, pain, and opposition, to not give up before one was fully spent and had done all that one could–within the rules (more or less). School games were about imparting discipline, fitness, and ideals of masculinity, especially the ideals necessary for an imperialist power. It is an important corrective to the impression that Victorian amateurs were not interested in winning or in achieving the highest in competition to note, as examples, that Boat Race crews trained for months under professional trainers, that the leading public schools employed coaches, and by the late nineteenth century Cambridge University employed close to twenty coaches for cricket alone (Huggins, 61, 32). If the discomfiture of the Masters of Caius and Trinity is historically accurate, it is also blissfully, and ironically, ignorant of University traditions.

Autonomous Amateurs

It seems clear from the historical material that Victorian amateurism was, in fact, profoundly concerned with excellence, and that although excellence was strongly indicated by winning, this was not the only indicator. A player was expected to do his utmost to win, more

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[12]See also Love, 612-3, on "broken time".

[13]Blackledge argues that this was the point: to keep working men at work. Thus, the (middle class) apologists for amateurism in football argued that such a player would only disadvantage himself in the long run; as William Cail maintained, "'the clerk who plays football is the greater loser in the long run. If an employer has two clerks, one of whom is constantly asking for leave off to play football, and the other constantly has his nose to the grindstone, when it comes to a case of promotion, which of these men will get it?'" And this is to say nothing of the professional player who would risk making of himself a "common wage slave" (48). There was, of course, a certain amount of flouting of these principles. As Blackledge notes: "Thus while all [northern rugby union clubs] were agreed that professionalism was a threat to their control of the game, some saw increased working class participation in the sport as a means to make their fortune. Thus players were paid for loss of earnings, stars were paid more and given lucrative inducements to transfer clubs." (45)

or less within the rules and, perhaps crucially, within the limits of sport as play. This might and increasingly did involve training–something a more leisured class was able to find time to do, whereas a working class player would require explicit financial support. But here we get to the real point of divergence between amateurist ideology and the growing professionalism of late nineteenth century sport. The professional sportsman had to show a return on his backer's investment. This claim on the sportsman is what horrified the amateur (though he may well have been the professional's patron): the professional owed his play to another, just as a worker owed his labour, and that made it a job, not sport, and made the "player" a commodity.

This hit a number of ideological buttons for the bourgeois amateur. The professional player sold his labour and thus forfeited his right in it, his freedom over it. The professional's efforts were now morally suspect on a number of levels: his "play" was mercenary rather than spontaneous or autonomous and his allegiance to sport and its rules was suspect; professionals, it was assumed, were likely to cheat. This is because, as with the working man's labour, he owes his play to another–his play is not free, not self-determined; he cannot choose to play or not to play, or to forego an unfair advantage. The professional player cannot be a free moral agent because his play is not his own; it is owned by the one who pays him to get a result.

Allison is right to point the finger at commercialism as the Victorian amateurists' proper enemy (Allison 3), but he does not fully mark out the specific liberal economic (Lockean) ideology that motivates it. The same consideration that makes a wage labourer unable to be a full citizen, namely, that he does not own his own property, i.e., his labour, makes a professional sportsman unable to play in the amateur sense. But this does help to explain just why it bothered them as much as it did–if sport was only about results and spectacle, if excellence in sport was this narrow, then sport was at the mercy of the same market forces that allowed them to buy and sell other commodities; it was no longer a place set apart, exempt from these considerations, a place where one could be not just instrumentally excellent, but as a human being (actually, a man). Sport, for the Victorians was a means of asserting moral character, choice and responsibility, one's free being, as well as trying one's hardest to win. In this sense, we can identify this ideal as one that embraces a broader conception of excellence, a human rather than the machine excellence that many of them were themselves advancing elsewhere in society.

The Victorians had already begun to develop sport associations in order to facilitate competition by regularising rules; they soon found them adequate instruments for combatting the threat of commercialism, aka professionalism. Thus, the advent of sport bureaucracy. In effect, they moved to prevent outside, i.e., commercial, control of sport by exerting bureaucratic control. The purging of professionals with which these sport associations were at various times seized was not so much because taking money in sport was inherently wrong, but because professionals represented the thin edge of loss of control from amateur associations

to commercial forces: commercial club owners, betting syndicates, and eventually television.[14] The struggle over amateurism was a struggle over control of sport which was a struggle over what counted as sport excellence: a narrow or a broad view, results (wins and gate receipts) or the process of play and self. In point of historical fact, these struggles were self-serving and frequently hypocritical. The amateurist establishment defended ideals that were, in their historical and social context and in their practice elitist in the most repellantly class-based sense. But their opponents were no purer, and the amateur ideal held an important core that modern commodity sport in both its professional and its "amateur" (high performance) iterations has done nothing to restore.

Ultimately, as suggested earlier in this paper, whether we think amateurism and a broader conception of excellence is better or worse than fully professionalised or fully bureaucratised high performance shamateur sport, depends on what, and whom, we think sport is for or, indeed, what sport is. A broad conception of excellence is far more appropriate to sport as a self-defining activity for all; the narrow conception makes players instrumental means to ends. If sport is about producing results, it makes sense to financially support them and to throw every possible resource at them–and, perhaps, to discard those that are no longer useful, as professional sport does. However, as we have seen, there are also plenty of compelling reasons not to do this.

Amateurism Redux

There are two important recoverable elements in the amateurist ideal: the separation of work and leisure, and the broader conception of excellence. For the Victorians, these functioned as class exclusionary principles; for us today, they could function as sport enabling principles, ones that could democratise sport away from the elitism of money and high performance. If sport is about producing results, it makes sense to concentrate limited resources in those areas where results are more likely. Sport is rarely truly free of cost; a healthy society does need to spend on sport if it is to be widely accessible, but seeing social health as a "result" requires broadening our concept of "result". In focussing so relentlessly on the elite, modern pro/high performance sport diminishes sport that is not of its class, while chewing up those who are, in the pursuit of ends that extract the instrumental from the human, and that are vanishingly attainable. Thus, while the Victorians pursued an elitism that excluded on the basis of social class, modern sport excludes those who are not of or destined for the elite by directing resources to an ever more exclusive few.

As Allison maintains, an emphasis on autonomy is key, though we need not endorse either Lockean property theory or Allison's utilitarian reasoning to ground this. Rather, the idea of sport as fundamentally play rather than labour, i.e., employment, is sufficient. Where sport is one's job, one's play is not self-determined, one is not a fully autonomous agent, and

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[14]See Allison, 50.

one's actions are owed not to self but to an other. Why are modern sports stars so often such irresponsible children? It's not simply because they spend their lives playing children's games; it's because they do nothing else, and because they do so, not as respite from responsible lives off the field, but without ever being responsible for what they do on their own account.

III: Conclusions

In the ideology of super-competitive excellence that dominates modern sport, in which the silver goes to the "first loser", the competitor is merely the vessel for the achievement, to be discarded from esteem the instant another passes the mark. Excellence here is an idol of abstraction, that to which one aims as an ever-increasing, or decreasing, tally of numbers. Excellence is not a quality of the athlete who achieves; it is that against which one is measured. But this is a moving measure, which once it is achieved vanishes, leaving the athlete once again unfinished, incomplete, and of no significance beside the measuring. Thus, sport is a futile endeavour. If one does not achieve, one is nothing; if one does, one is soon after nothing again. The athlete cannot him or herself *be* excellent; only touch excellence, perhaps, for a fleeting moment. The athlete is the ephemeris of excellence.

A rational amateurism, rather than a class-based one, might be an appropriate alternative to such an instrumental vision of sport, one that streams children into (and out of) result-oriented high performance programmes. Commercialised and elite sport remove the rational encumbrances on the pursuit of excellence, slowly eroding the self that is supposed to choose what is rational and what is moral. The issue here is not only that of whether it is rational to put oneself on a course of action that may lead to personal, especially physical, harm for oneself or another (as any sport is likely to do), but whether it is rational to put oneself, or one's children, into an environment that will diminish the capacity to develop into a fully responsible, agential self. Some harms are rational, or at least rationally tolerable; others are more positively irrational, and harming one's capacity to be an autonomous rational being, able to think and act on one's own responsibility, must be among this number. If the most rational course for a (potentially) free, rational, morally responsible being is to take action that preserves and enhances those characteristics, then a truly amateur sport is a rational alternative to commercial and high performance sport. A rational amateurism, then, is one that is directed to this end of enhancing rational agency on the part of the sport participant rather than eliding it, by emphasising the spectrum of excellences in sport, i.e., not only results, but character and experience (including the kinetic, aesthetic, and phenomenological).

Such a rational amateurism should feature in a democratised approach to sport. In describing it as a democratic ideal, we would recognise that access to the physical and broadly moral benefits of sport is a question of social justice. We cannot ignore the real political, social, and economic conditions that prevent universal access to these benefits, but solving them requires changing the way in which we distribute that access; establishing more elite

programmes does not ensure a "right to play". To put the point bluntly, which matters more: that one person runs 100 metres in under 9 seconds or that thousands run at all?

Nor can we pretend that a truly amateur sport would abolish distinctions between elite athletes and those of vaguer competence. The pursuit of athletic excellence and its individuation remains central to this understanding of sport, along with the *subjective* appropriation of one's own bodily movement and expression. Nevertheless, it is truly amateur sport that significantly better realises the core ideals of a sport defined in terms of activity and the pursuit of excellence through serious play. Part of this must be to recognise that sport is best for humans when it is something that enhances rather than takes total control over their lives, when it helps them to be better citizens and better people, rather than better investments. Sport is for humans, not humans for sport. Play must be the thing in which to develop the conscience of the players, as well as their bodies, and to recover the possibility for play, for excellence, and for becoming, that is at the heart of athletic movement. The future may well have been with the movie's Harold Abrahams, but that may not have been the triumph for sport that it seemed.

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