

The Alternative

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Dear Reader,

This issue of the Newsletter is on sports in relation to violence and international policies. The essay by T.H. Gambling documents the history of war considered as a game. It is therefore tempting to think of sports as a preparation for war and a tool of national policy when a democratic government is trying to persuade a reluctant population to support a war. This function of sports, however, is relatively new, a result of the “total war” initiated by World War I that involved the whole population. Before that time, a soldier class was prepared for the game of war by physical and mental discipline which could be embodied in sporting matches. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the great liberal jurist, wrote: “I gaze with delight upon our polo players. If once in a while a neck is broken, I regard it not as a waste but as a price well paid for the breeding of a race fit for leadership and command.”

War itself has been in drastic change over the last few decades. Where sports fit today in relation to violence, war, and international diplomacy deserves more study and debate than it receives. The Olympics generates some discussion, especially since the murders at the 1972 Olympics and the several boycotts in subsequent years. But the Olympics are a mostly distorted version of ordinary international dealings. Sports (along with music) often provide a diplomatic opening with a power seldom acknowledged. Sports are also a powerful influence on domestic politics. Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980 owed much to the U.S. hockey team’s victory over the Soviet Union earlier that year. One of the important factors in Barack Obama’s election was the presence of Tiger Woods on the world stage for a decade. Larry Dorman’s essay points out the extraordinary place of Tiger Woods in international sports and politics.

Gabriel Moran’s essay argues against the supposedly proved thesis that there is a direction relation between sport and war. He argues that, on the contrary, sports – when not corrupted by external influences – are an alternative to war. The problem of linking sports with war is based on confusing aggressiveness and violence. Aggressiveness for both girls and boys is healthy and can find expression in nonviolent ways. Humans, similar to other animals, need rituals for working through inevitable conflicts with others of the same species. That conflict begins with the relation of parent and child, and calls for family rituals that mediate differences. Sports and other games in the work world are needed to allow for aggressive activity that is an alternative to violence. Sports can be a means of international mediation that avoids violent confrontations.

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THE SHOTS HEARD ROUND THE WORLD

By Larry Dorman

Y. E. Yang's stunning upset of Tiger Woods at the PGA Championship added a double shot of momentum to golf which had already benefited from the August announcement that the sport had cleared a major hurdle for inclusion in the 2016 Olympics. The lingering image of Yang holding aloft both his golf bag and the Wannamaker trophy – the man who did not back down – resonated with Korean audiences, and may, some believe, have an almost immediate impact on the business of golf.

“Whenever someone accomplishes a milestone that has never been reached before – especially in sports – it tends to inspire a generation,” said Ty Votaw, the PGA executive director of the International Golf Federation Olympic Golf Committee. “The impact of Y.E. Yang's win at the PGA Championship will be felt immediately on the local tournament level – an increase in hospitality sales, ticket sales, Korean media interest and coverage.

“But the long-term impact on the game of golf globally will best be measured when the next generation of golfers recall the time they saw Y.E. Yang win the P.G.A. Championship and were inspired to pick up the game, much like what Se Ri Pak did for women's golf in Korea eleven years ago.” Pak, then 20, won the L.P.G.A. Championship and the United States Women's Open in her rookie season on the LPGA Tour.

Yang, a 37-year-old from Seoul South Korea, is an appealing character, with a back story tailored to those gauzy Olympic featurettes. A late bloomer from a modest background, Yang taught himself to play starting at age 19, pounding balls at the ubiquitous double-deck driving ranges that dot the landscape in Seoul.

That a golfer could spring from a background so unusual at a relatively advanced age and earn a spot on the PGA Tour is storybook enough. That he could win a tour event, as he did in the Spring at the Honda Classic, is surprising. That he could do what he did at the PGA Championship has taken surprise to a new level of meaning.

“We think you'll see an immediate jump in participation among young boys, and greater interest in funding golf programs additional to what is already in place for women since Se Ri Pak emerged in the 90's,” said Joe Steranka, the chief executive of the PGA of America. “The way he accomplished it, beating the number one player in the world who played a solid round that would normally have got it done – Yang was really impressive.”

All this may take time to resonate with another part of the sport's constituency – pundits, romantics, and counter-intuitively people who want dominant people to dominate. To many in this group, Yang's victory over Woods was further proof that whichever stars govern major championship outcomes were misaligned in 2009.

The story line that dominated after Cabrera's win at the Master's was this: Kenny Perry who was then 48, should have been granted his first major championship at the Master's and become the oldest winner of a major. And when Lucas Glover won the United States Open over Phil Mickelson, the sentimental favorite, the theme gathered steam. Stewart Cink then beat Tom Watson in the British Open, denying a 59-year-old legend his sixth major. Even normally sober observers thought it unseemly of Cink, a 36-year-old from Georgia to ruin such a great story.

Now comes Yong-eun Yang, 150 to 1 shot when the P.G.A. Championship began, a man who his caddy says does not scare easily. He did the unthinkable, playing the last 5 holes in two under while Woods played them one over. A 37-year-old with one PGA win taking down the No. 1 golfer in the world, in the stretch run at a major?

Sometimes the unplanned comes together, as has the list of major championship winners in 2009, and something bigger happens.

THE GAME OF WAR

T.H. Gambling

Throughout military history war has been seen through the prism of a game. A game is an organized human activity that is played according to written and unwritten rules. It is an alternate reality within ordinary reality in which participants strive to attain some goal. There are endless examples of the games people play in school, work, religion, sports, meals, therapy, courts, weddings, funerals and so forth. Ludwig Wittgenstein made famous the idea that language itself is best viewed as a game, that is, various games are played with language according to different “forms of life.” From the time of our earliest histories, war had most of the elements of a game.

Perhaps the earliest rule of war was a principle of fair play, a rule that underlies other rules. In war, injury requires restitution of some kind. The conviction runs deep even among people today that justice requires a balancing of debts. A criminal has to be punished to re-establish harmony in the universe. The retaliation of a tribe for bloodshed may appear to the outsider as vengeance but the responding party sees it as keeping faith with one’s people both past and present. The *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye) was a rule to keep violence within bounds. Avoid escalation by taking no more than an eye for an eye.

The first great treatise on the game of war is *The Art of War* attributed to Sun Zi (Sun Zu) in the fourth century BCE. Writing within a Taoist context, the author has a paradoxical view of war when the game has to be played and it is a game that is best if not played at all. The *Art of War* is closely related to a more famous work of the same era, *Tao Te Ching*, which describes how to rule a state by non-action (*wu wei*). Sun Zi’s *Art of War* applies the principles to war. A superior general would subdue an enemy without fighting. The book does not glorify winning battles or killing the enemy.

If actual battles cannot be avoided, cleverness is what should rule so that there would be the least loss of life. “War is not a matter of the more troops the better. So long as one does not advance rashly, concentrates his strength, and understands his enemy, that will suffice to take the foe.” War should also be quick. “There has never been a case of prolonged war from which a kingdom benefited.” Much of the *Art of War* may be out of date but a world in which the rules were still being formed may speak to a world where the rules of the game have broken down.

At about the same time that the *Art of War* was composed, Plato was describing his ideal state in which a military class would rule. In Book Five of the *Republic*, Plato lays down some rules of war. The section is attached to his discussion of women and children. That location of the text may seem strange but Plato says that “men and women will serve together, and take the children to war with them when they are old enough to let them see, as they do in other trades, the jobs they will have to do when they grow up.” Plato says to put them on horseback as young as possible and have them ride out to watch the fighting.

The Greeks by the time of Plato’s *Republic* had suffered through some very bloody conflicts, and new techniques of war threatened to increase the bloodshed. Plato was most concerned with what he calls “civil strife” between Greeks. Plato laid down rules for wars between city states. “They will not, as Greeks, devastate Greek lands or burn Greek dwellings; nor will they admit that the whole people of a state – men, women and children – are their enemies but only the hostile minority who are responsible for the quarrel.” It is reasonable to take the opponents’ crops but the war is not going to last forever so that ravaging the land is forbidden.

Plato’s rules for civil strife were incorporated into Augustine of Hippo’s attempt to regulate war in the Christian world. Writing as the Roman Empire was collapsing, Augustine tried to work out a compromise between the Christian conscience and an increasingly violent world. He thought

that a Christian should die rather than kill in his own defense. But if a vulnerable individual or group was attacked, the Christian had a duty to defend the defenseless. That logic allowed for many mischievous reasons for fighting wars. Augustine's rules for just reasons to begin war and just ways to fight wars have echoed down through the centuries. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century took over Augustine's rules of war and they are still cited by national leaders when they attempt to justify war.

The crusading spirit of the Middle Ages led to chaotic violence that culminated in the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In reaction to horrendous violence, the rules of war became much more detailed and explicit. A war had a formal declaration of its beginning, stating that two nations were at war. At the end, a few months or years hence, the conclusion was staged with even greater formality. The provisions of surrender were put in writing, the generals shook hands, and the game was over. One side won, the other lost; the loser lived to play again.

The game was played by actors in proper uniforms and before an audience of appreciative onlookers. It was a contest of wiles, tactics, and precision maneuvering. A breakthrough would symbolize victory. The soldier was professionally trained to act without letting loose any passions; hatred of the enemy could get in the way of efficient warfare. Some actions were off bounds. You did not fire at generals, messengers, or flag bearers. Sometimes the game halted while each side was allowed to recover its dead and wounded from the field of play.

A main motive for Karl von Clausewitz's *On War* was that the Napoleonic wars had violated many of the rules of war as a legitimate extension of state policy. Clausewitz feared that "since the time of Bonaparte, war...has assumed quite a new nature, or rather it has approached much nearer to its real nature, to its absolute perfection." In the nineteenth century, with a series of conference treaties at Geneva, The Hague and St. Petersburg, Europe pulled back from war in its "absolute perfection."

On War stands out as the most insightful, detailed and consistent study of war as a game, "of all branches of human activity the most like a gambling game." For Clausewitz, "combat is the real warlike activity, everything else is only its auxiliary." This combat can be understood as a duel on an extensive scale. The point is "to compel our opponent to fulfill our will." The military leader has to find the opponent's center of gravity and attack it. The center could be the enemy's army, the capital, or the army of a stronger ally.

The soldiers in an army must be committed to the "honor of its arms" if it is to be a formidable fighting force. Clausewitz thinks that "benevolence" is the worst error in war. Although there are rules to restrict killing, Clausewitz wants a recognition that war is a game of bloodshed. "The fact that slaughter is a horrifying spectacle must make us take war more seriously, but not provide an excuse for gradually blunting our swords in the name of humanity. Sooner or later someone will come along with a sharp sword and hack off our arms."

Clausewitz's cold-blooded description of the game of war may be horrifying but it has the virtue of being candid about the bloody nature of war rather than allowing national leaders to talk in abstractions and euphemisms. Clausewitz believed that wars are inevitable and must be taken seriously. He thought that if the professionally played game between nations were to break down, the violence and bloodshed would spill from the battlefield to every city and village, every man, woman and child.

At the Nuremberg trials, Hermann Goering gave an autographed photo to the U.S. General, Carl Spaatz. On it was the inscription: "War is like a football game; whoever loses gives his opponent the hand, and everything is forgotten." In light of the Nazi atrocities and tens of millions dead, the statement seems bizarre. Goering did not grasp that by 1945 the old rules of the game had

collapsed. As a pilot in World War I, Goering would dip his wings to a disabled opponent and fly on rather than administer the *coup de grace*. In that war many of the rules of war were being broken but the generals could still imagine war as a game in which players knew the rules.

At the beginning of the World War, war still connoted two nations sending their teams on to the field to determine which would be victorious. As more nations were dragged into the contest and the position of each army became frozen, the whole economy of each nation was mobilized for a war of attrition. The technology of war had drastically changed in the decades leading up to the war. Human bodies were still needed to fill the trenches but they were more vulnerable to sophisticated weaponry.

Before the War disintegrated into irrational slaughter, rules of war were observed by the troops in unofficial pacts. War was still a game to be played fairly; the other team was not to be attacked during time outs. An especially poignant moment was when British and German troops agreed to a cease fire on Christmas Day in 1914. The soldiers threw snowballs instead of shooting their weapons. The high commanders of both sides must have been horrified at the soldiers playing another game in which the enemy were just ordinary guys playing for the other team. Each side acknowledged the professed Christianity of the other in observing the birth of Jesus, who is called the prince of peace. It is difficult to imagine the feelings on December 26 when the war game resumed and the aim again became killing the opposing team.

COMPETITIVE SPORTS: AGGRESSIVE AND NONVIOLENT

By Gabriel Moran

Konrad Lorenz argued that sports, as a way of expressing aggression, are an alternative to war. The most widely cited study on the matter by Richard Sipes, in *American Anthropologist*, supposedly proved the opposite, namely, that combative sports and warlike cultures go together. Actually, the Sipes study proved very little and the main point that Lorenz made about the educational value of sports for a nonviolent life is more important than ever. The problem lies not in the statistics but in the formulation of the problem.

One has to start with a clear distinction between aggressive tendencies and expressions that can be either violent or nonviolent. When uncorrupted, sports are an expression of the healthy aggressiveness which everyone needs. Sipes' study was skewed from the beginning. The first part of the study tries to measure the relation between "warlike societies" and "combative sports"; neither category is clear. The second part of the study on the relation of sports and war across a time span within U. S. culture was vaguer and inconclusive.

Sipes distinguishes warlike and "relatively peaceful societies" which he said were not easy to find. "I had to investigate 130 societies to find eleven of which five were rejected because of insufficient information." He defined "combative sports" as having real or *simulated* bodily contact with the aim of immobilizing or subjugating an opponent. His obvious example was wrestling; beyond that the application of the category is fuzzy. He correlates warlike societies and combative sports judging that a society does not have combative sports if any ethnographer speaks of amusement, recreation and games in a culture and does not mention combative sports. He found only two of the ten peaceful societies had combative sports; nine out of ten warlike societies had combative sports. War and sports, it is concluded, are directly not inversely related.

For exploring the relation between sports and war, one would have to step back to simpler categories. Then one would have to follow a narrative of how particular sports have been related to a culture or nation throughout its history. An important piece of the story is that when a sport becomes corrupted, for example, by big money, the sport disintegrates into violent eruptions within its games and at its games. Sport itself is not violent; as Lorenz correctly saw, it is an alternative to

violence.

The starting point is not “combative sports” but play as a universal characteristic of animal life. Peter Kropotkin in his 1902 book, *Mutual Aid*, wrote that “all animals...are fond of plays, wrestling, running after each other, trying to capture each other, teasing each other.” Kropotkin interpreted this phenomenon as a manifestation of the “joy of life, a desire to communicate with individuals of the same or other species.” The random running, wrestling and teasing quickly find expression in games, that is, rule-governed interaction among players. “Game” is widely used as a prism through which to view human life and all its institutions. When the game of life is well played, the rules establish fair competition and ward off violence. Those who appreciate the significance of a game sometimes experience it as a matter of life and death; true, as it is often said, “it is only a game,” but so is life.

As competitive skills are sharpened, there is a natural tendency toward “professionalizing” in the original sense of that term: an unusual talent or grace is put at the service of a community (without concern for money). Many professional athletes retain some of this ideal; they love playing the game with skill and dedication. Unfortunately, professional is commonly understood today to mean big money. An athlete who trains for years and displays skills for an appreciative audience does deserve income. But money tends to corrupt sport; billions of dollars corrupts absolutely. The international Olympics tried to maintain an unrealistic meaning of amateur as the opposite of professional, while at the same time it sunk into a morass of big business.

The key word for sport as an alternative to violence and war is “competitive” not “combative.” Genuinely competitive sports have the aim of measuring oneself against an opponent; none has the aim of physically harming one’s opponent. Sipes used “wrestling” as his obvious example of a combative sport. Many people have never seen the actual sport of wrestling that can be found in some high schools and colleges. It is obviously aggressive but its rules preclude violence. In contrast, what is called “professional wrestling” is not a sport but violent entertainment. Most of the terrible blows in this spectacle are staged but the human body still takes a beating. The relation between the actors (“wrestlers”) and the audience is a complicity in violence, real and pretended.

As Lorenz argued, play, games or sports are an alternative to both a lack of aggressiveness and aggressiveness expressed as violence. Title IX in 1972 that provided opportunities for women to engage more seriously in competitive sports was a great educational advance. Women, as much as men, need a healthy outlet for aggressiveness. It is not yet clear whether women’s sports can avoid the corruption that affects many men’s sports. Audience attraction to a sport can encourage excellence by the players. It is also why sports can be tragically misused by unscrupulous leaders, including television advertisers, baseball owners, college presidents, and national lawmakers.

Some of the professional players gain fame or fortune while they are being exploited. Big time football in the United States is used by colleges to attract attention and make money. The players, the great majority of whom never graduate from college, are doubly exploited. These colleges function as minor leagues for the National Football League. The players should share in the wealth but that would be to give away what the game is.

U.S. football, which has little relation to world football (soccer), has a peculiar and frightening relation to the nation’s culture. Sipes’ study included football as a combative sport whose attendance increased during World War II and the Korean War. Back then, football was mainly a college sport; professional football was of minor significance. As the United States has become more militaristic since World War II, professional football has acquired a central place in the culture. Sundays, once set aside for the leisure of prayer and family gatherings, now unites the nation across time zones with “football in America.”

A key factor in how sport can be put at the service of violence is the role of television. The

audience for the sport can rise almost exponentially. For sports with a small audience, attention is paid to the skills of the players. In opening the sport to a wider audience, television can expose the game to viewers attracted by cruder aspects of the play. Three decades ago, Christopher Lasch pointed out that the corruption of professional hockey into bouts of planned violence occurred when television brought the sport to places unfamiliar with ice hockey. As a real sport on a field in Alberta or in the Montreal Forum, hockey was aggressive but not violent. An audience in Atlanta or Dallas that has little feel for the real sport have to be attracted by something other than hockey skill. Violence is now an acceptable part of professional hockey.

Unlike hockey, officials in U.S. football still prevent interruptions of violent fighting, but the whole game has become violent. The elaborate equipment, supposedly to protect the player, is often used as a weapon. The human body cannot be protected against the beating that professional football players take. The whole sport has acquired the appearance of a technologized war. As often pointed out, its figures of speech are warlike (the long bomb, the blitz, the sack). It is not surprising that the sentiments generated by today's professional football could be manipulated into support of a war. That is far from saying that sport and war go together.

A few words should be said of baseball because of its importance in modern U.S. history and its potential for misplaced patriotism. It is hardly "the national pastime" and probably never was but its long and winding history throws light on the changes in the culture. Sipes used baseball as an example of a "non-combative sport." He measured attendance figures at major league parks which declined during World War II and the Korean War. Sipes admitted there were many possible reasons for that and he declined to draw any firm conclusions.

To study baseball's relation to violence one would have to start at the beginning with immigrants, a field, a stick, and a ball. Professional baseball was at first a disreputable bunch of men who preferred play to factory work. It evolved into a game of lost innocence, consisting mainly of two people playing catch and a batter who usually fails to get a hit. It became a national sport not through television but through radio, it was a game of imagination.

Baseball, however, had become big business before television brought in a huge increase in power and money for the owners of teams. Until a 1970 Supreme Court case, the players were literally owned; they had no rights as players. Baseball owners still play upon the nostalgia of legislators to get exemption from some laws and financial support for new stadiums that cater to the rich. Baseball in recent times has mirrored the national malaise, reflected in strikes, illegal and dangerous drug use, and unrealistic salaries. It has also outsourced the work so that the United States is not the best in world competitions of baseball. Especially in Caribbean nations, a poor boy with a ball and glove still hopes for a place in the big show.

Baseball, despite the corrupting influences, still has elements of innocent play. Violence is unusual; even when dugouts empty and players pile on one another, injury very seldom occurs. Baseball is a very aggressive game but contact is incidental; a manager kicking dirt on the umpire's shoes is considered shocking. Unlike both hockey where officials are at risk of bodily harm and football where officials take no backtalk, baseball includes complaining to the umpire as part of the game. All the talk does not change the last call but it lets off steam and might influence future calls.

The aggressiveness of baseball makes it a good example for a nonviolent life. However, with the influx of staggering amounts of money and the failure of cultural leaders to protect the sport, professional baseball's fans can lose the perspective of someone who appreciates skill and dedication even on the opposing team. When a sport has been corrupted, being "number one" is the only success: If you are not a Super Bowl winner, you are a loser. In baseball, a first division finish used to be a successful season; the pennant was bigger success; the World Series was an extra

bonus when even non-fans paid attention. Now, in baseball like football, it is World Series winner or nothing.

The sport of golf has many similarities to baseball. Violence is excluded but commentators regularly use the word aggressive when describing a particular golfer's approach to the game. Professional golf was a rich man's game until recently. Now it attracts men and women from a wide slice of society across the world. While Babe Ruth made baseball into a national sport, Tiger Woods transformed golf internationally. It was Woods' influence that brought big television money to golf. The money makes the game attractive to players but may move the sport toward super bowl mentality. A top ten finish in a tournament no longer counts for much if you can't win a major. And will a "fed ex cup" worth ten million dollars eventually obscure even winning a major? The sport, however, will likely survive so long as two people enjoy competing at driving a little ball and putting it into a hole.

The chant of "we're number one" is terribly dangerous in a country with military might. Playing at games is inimical to war but the corruption of sports fits neatly into a warlike mentality. Kaj Bjorkqvist writes that Lorenz's hypothesis that viewing aggressive sports as a vicarious outlet for violence is refuted by "soccer hooliganism." Bjorkqvist, in citing this "real-life refutation," proves nothing except that soccer, like other sports, can be corrupted. Children around the world who can find an open field and a ball play the game in an aggressive and not violent way. But international soccer, like U.S. football or baseball, is vulnerable to exploitation by cynical governments and greedy corporations. Spectators who are frustrated in their personal lives have little perspective on the game as a game. The only thing that counts is winning, which is an attitude that breeds violence. The mixing of professional sport and pseudo-patriotism is a volatile mixture.

There is a role for the intelligent spectator of a sport who appreciates skillful performance. But the fan (short for "fanatic") needs other outlets for aggressiveness. That includes appreciating other skillful performances besides sports, such as music or dance. And sports that are not professionalized also need appreciation. There are still "semi-pro" baseball leagues where the game is played seriously by players not out for money. There are still kids playing touch football on a patch of grass or playing basketball with a netless hoop in a playground. Unfortunately, the simple joy of playing baseball barely survives its excessive organization by Little Leagues.

It is doubtful one can be a good sports fan unless one also participates as a player in some games. Most people do not have the skills to compete in highly organized sports such as hockey, baseball, lacrosse, basketball, or tennis. But practically all boys and girls can have some fun at running, jumping, throwing a ball, arm wrestling and otherwise competing in aggressive and nonviolent ways. A nonviolent life has to include a variety of aggressive practices in the game of life and all the playful activities that start in infancy and should not disappear as long as we live.