

Philosophy of Sport

Philosophy of Sport:
International Perspectives

Edited by

Alun Hardman and Carwyn Jones

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT: GLOBAL ISSUES FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

ALUN HARDMAN AND CARWYN JONES

As an academic discipline, the philosophy of sport has been in existence for a relatively short period of time—about fifty years.¹ However, if we think that sport viewed from a philosophical perspective entails the explicit examination of its inherent qualities, then in one sense, the philosophical study of sport is as old as sport itself. Other sub-disciplinary perspectives on sport can be viewed in the same way—physics, biology, and psychology are all inherently connected to sporting performance and were so long before they became areas of specialised academic interest for biomechanists, physiologists or sports psychologists, etc., who now inhabit university research laboratories.

Though the philosophy of sport as an academic endeavour is relatively embryonic, a philosophical view of sport is not new even. When the ancient Greeks strove to ensure that their Olympians were able to perform at their peak, equal importance was placed on critically examining the nature, purpose and value that sport and physical activity played in Greek life. The Greeks were particularly concerned with how practising such activities was pleasing to the gods. So we can see in the works of early philosophers such as Plato, and Aristotle, signs that sports as a cultural phenomenon raises important questions that are philosophical in nature.

And now in current times, despite the fact that the formal academic study of sport has a compartmentalised focus on technical performance, philosophy continues to provide an alternative critical avenue to conceive of sport. To a large extent then, whilst much of what is studied in relation to sport focuses on the *techné* or 'know-how,' which allows for implementing

more effective means for improving generally unquestioned ends—philosophy considers sport in terms of *eudaimonia*—its overall good, value or virtue.

The philosopher's role and the importance of a philosophical outlook on sport cannot be underestimated. The two central processes that preoccupy the philosophic approach are those of clarification and justification. Philosophers then, ask two central questions, "What do you mean?" and "How do you know?" In the context of sport, matters of clarification ("what do you mean?") are relevant for examining matters of fact, or the nature of the object or phenomenon of interest to the philosopher. As with other aspects of critical enquiry, such clarification will involve the presentation and examination of relevant information in ways that are appropriate to the discipline of philosophy. Clear and logical conceptual argumentation is essential for this task in order to arrive at a position where those engaged in philosophical work can agree effectively, or at least have an understanding as to where they disagree on matters of philosophical interest. An example of such philosophical clarification work has been central to foundational treatises on the nature of the concepts of play, game and sport in the early philosophical scholarship on sport.²

In the context of philosophy, matters of justification ("how do you know?") inhabit the inherent greyness of normativity—the great swathe of human knowledge and understanding that lies in between the substantially smaller domains of objective certainty and subjective preference. For many philosophers then, truth and knowledge does not have the logical certainty of mathematical concepts (such as $2 + 2 = 4$) or that of natural science (such as the existence of gravity). Nor is philosophical truth a matter of personal like or dislike (such as one's preferred flavour of ice-cream). Instead, what constitutes philosophical knowledge is marked by how the clarity and astuteness of argument and reasoning stands in relation to competing and alternative arguments and reasoning. As such, the normative domain involves persuasion and debate, where it is those arguments and reasoning that come to be accepted as the best arguments and reasoning, that hold sway over peoples beliefs and values.

The philosophical study of sport, in terms of methodological approach then, mirrors philosophical study elsewhere except that the central focus that binds scholars (somewhat loosely) together coalesce around a shared interest in the social practice of sport. As with the philosophy of

education, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of sport has emerged as a discrete philosophical sub-discipline in its own right. Within the sub-discipline a number of central philosophical questions have interested the majority of scholars. Of greatest interest are issue of an ethical nature where the moral conduct and behaviour of sportsmen and women and the overall moral atmosphere of sport is examined and evaluated in relation to a number of enduring and novel issues. Many readers will be familiar with ethical debates about the rightness or wrongness of using performance enhancing substances, the importance of fair play, and concerns that various sports participants have regarding justice and equity for sports participation. The enduring popularity of these issues reflect the view of French philosopher, Albert Camus who states that from sport “I learned all I knew about ethics.” Other philosophical interests include debates about the meaning and value of sport, its nature, its existential significance and its aesthetic qualities. Sport therefore gives rise to a broad range of philosophical questions which are reflected in this book. Collectively, the intent is that they provide both further insight into the intriguing world of sport, but in addition provides the means by which sport further reflects and informs our understanding of life in general

The original idea for this book emerged following 36th meeting of the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS) held at Tokyo Metropolitan University in 2008. IAPS was established in 1972 as the Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport and later in 1999 changed its name to IAPS. The organization is committed to stimulate, encourage, and promote research, scholarship, and teaching in the philosophy of sport and related practices. IAPS members are found all over the world and constitute a growing and vibrant international community of scholars and teachers. IAPS’ main publication is the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, which is widely acknowledged as the most respected medium for communicating contemporary philosophic thought with regard to sport. This publication provides scholars who presented at that meeting a further opportunity to disseminate their work to a broader readership.

The book is divided into five parts which broadly reflect a number of themes shared by the contributing authors. The first section concerns questions related to the nature of play games and sport, the second examines the artistic, aesthetic and spiritual aspects of sport. Section three explores the relationships between sporting activity and human physical embodiment. Section four presents a number of ethical issues in sport and

the fifth and final section addresses the relationship between philosophy and internationalisation.

The contributions reflect the eclectic and geographically diverse membership of IAPS, with authors from seven countries and three continents.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive account of the history of the philosophy of sport see Scott Kretchmar's "Philosophy of Sport," in John Messingale and Richard Swanson (eds.) *The History of Exercise and Sport Science*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, (1997): 181-202.

² In particular, the work of Bernard Suits in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978 provides the cornerstone of much early scholarship in the philosophy of sport.

PART I:

THE NATURE OF SPORT, PLAY AND GAMES

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING SMALL ABOUT SPORT: A PHILOSOPHICAL RECOVERY OF MORAL LEADERSHIP

TIM ELCOMBE

Discussion revolving around leadership inundated the sport world in the last days of spring and first days of summer in 2010. English football, for instance, entered FIFA's World Cup full of hope, in no small part to the anticipated influence of new manager Fabio Capello. After two matches and two subsequent draws, English critics (as well as starting centre back John Terry, the former national side captain) openly questioned Capello's ability to lead the Three Lions to World Cup glory. Following England's ouster in the Round of 16, Capello's reputation completed its transformation from genius to overbearing tactical dinosaur. Other managers at the World Cup, including French coach Raymond Domenech and Argentina's legendary Diego Maradona, endured endless scrutiny of their leadership efficacy in tournament previews. Predictions of France's demise, attributed in no small part to Domenech's ineffective leadership, proved accurate with the squad's early exit from South Africa. Maradona, despite his unorthodox leadership style, silenced critics with his team's brilliant play in their first matches—only to face renewed criticism after Argentina's humiliating defeat in the quarter finals. On the pitch in South Africa, several players faced ongoing questions as to their ability to lead from within the squad, including Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal, Argentina's Lionel Messi, and Samuel Eto'o of Cameroon.

Concurrently, basketball events in Los Angeles evoked assessments of leadership greatness. Phil Jackson, coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, won a record eleventh National Basketball Association (NBA) championship, further cementing his legacy as one of sport's best all-time leaders. His on-court star, Kobe Bryant, captured a fifth title and second as undisputed focal point of the Lakers. Meanwhile, on June 4, 2010, legendary college

basketball coach John Wooden passed away in Los Angeles months short of his one hundredth birthday. Winner of ten National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) titles as the University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) coach (and one as a player at Purdue University), Wooden stood as a paragon of leadership in and beyond basketball. As UCLA Chancellor Gene Block mused when eulogizing Coach Wooden, “[his] legacy transcends athletics; what he did was produce leaders. But his influence has reached far beyond our campus and even our community. Through his work and his life, he imparted his phenomenal understanding of leadership and his unwavering sense of integrity to so many people” (UCLA, 2010).¹

Away from the action, the leadership abilities of high profile administrators in sport similarly faced scrutiny in the spring and early summer of 2010. National Football League (NFL) commissioner Roger Goodell continued to use the power of his office to suspend players, including Pittsburgh Steelers’ star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, for poor off-field behaviour. Gary Bettman, commissioner of the National Hockey League (NHL), and his top officials dealt with highly public issues, including debates over suspensions (or lack thereof) for players targeting the heads of opponents with hits, as well as the financial quandaries of franchises in Southern USA locales such as Phoenix and Atlanta. Despite previous statements of defiance, egregious refereeing errors at the World Cup forced FIFA’s head, Sepp Blatter, to reluctantly reconsider the possibility of utilizing technology in future tournaments.

Whether on the pitch or court, on the sidelines, or in administrative offices, discussion revolving around those considered “leaders” or “non-leaders” in sport raises important questions about leadership more widely. What makes an effective leader? How does one define leadership? How do ethical leaders act? When it comes to the topic of “leadership”, including within the broad field of sport, various forms of management studies tend to dominate inquiry. Research in these academic disciplines and sub-disciplines examine what a leader *is* in a reductively scientific sense in order to better understand what an “effective” leader *does* in a practical sense. Even inquiry into “leadership ethics” seems to mostly reside in the field of management “science”. But considered pragmatically, leadership can be viewed as an important *idea* infused with values and norms that greatly impact all forms of culture—including sport. Consequently, the moral forces that shape our ideas about leadership and what ethical leadership means need to be subject-matters for philosophers of sport.

To engage in a philosophical recovery of leadership, current conceptions informing leadership will be quickly overviewed, as will the cultural conditions that fuel this limited perspective. Pragmatic ideas about our social existence, the role of cultural habits, and democracy will then be presented to serve as a backdrop against which a reoriented view of leadership can be developed. Finally, the central role of ethics, and how “thinking small” importantly revitalizes our vision of leadership, will be introduced.

Leadership and the Corporatist Mentality

Gary Yukl begins his text *Leadership in Organizations* by stating “Leadership is a subject that has long excited interest among scholars and laypeople alike.”² Yet despite the rise of “scientific interest” in the topic over the past 100 years, renowned leadership scholar Warren Bennis contends that “the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it...and still the concept is not sufficiently defined.”³ Ralph Stogdill, another influential leadership theorist before his death in 1978, wrote “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.”⁴

These three quotes from acknowledged experts reveal some important insights into the state of “leadership studies”. First, questions about leadership, including what characteristics make a good leader, how ethical leaders behave, and how one can transform into a leader pique the curiosity of many within various fields including politics, business, education, as well as sport.

Second, as both Bennis and Stogdill note, answering questions posed about leadership with reductive conclusions evades consensus. Literally thousands of varying definitions of what leadership is and analyses of what leaders do are available in the academic literature. As Yukl notes, beyond the shared assumption that leadership involves a social influence process, “the numerous definitions...proposed appear to have little else in common.”⁵

Finally, it seems apparent that theorists working within a business management paradigm (including industrial psychology) dominate inquiry into and the facilitation of leadership studies. In addition to Yukl, Bennis,

and Stogdill—all of whom engaged in research within American Schools of Business—other prominent and acknowledged leadership gurus studied in sport contexts typically emerge from business or related industrial psychology worlds. Interestingly, however, successful coaches from highly visible sports stand as one group of non-business professionals acknowledged as “leadership experts”—in other words, publish books on the topic of “leadership.” Yet upon closer inspection, the publisher notes on leadership books such as those written by famous American basketball coaches including Mike Krzyzewski, Pat Riley, and Dean Smith, all emphasize the applicability of their ideas to business as much as they do sport.⁶

The significance of this quick analysis is captured by the following summation: leaders play an incredibly lauded role in our cultures, including sport, yet we seem unable to pinpoint a detailed concept of leadership despite over a hundred years of dedicated, scientifically-based inquiry. Is Phil Jackson’s “Zen-like” approach better than Fabio Capello’s rigid methods to lead athletes from the sidelines? Does the flamboyant personality of Ronaldo, the quietness of Messi, or the relentlessness of Kobe serve as the optimal inter-squad leadership model? How do Roger Goodell’s proactive approach to athletic administration and Sepp Blatter’s administrative conservatism compare from a leadership perspective? Was league commissioner David Stern simply born to lead a multinational organization such as the NBA? Where do ethics fit in the leadership mix?

What leadership is and how it is done continually resists cause-effect simplification. A significant reason for the inability to better understand leadership arises from a failure to consider the topic more philosophically—in other words, to view it widely from the standpoint of “generating ideas”. Analysis becomes stuck at a mechanical level, thus reducing leadership to a purely psychological concept rather than a more broadly conceived ‘lived’ notion. We erroneously limit perceptions of leadership to simplistic, linear cause-effect mechanisms, falling prey to what John Dewey termed the “business mind”—the prevalence of value standards resulting from economic success and prosperity.⁷ This value-laden commitment to efficiency and accumulation through specialization, labelled by Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul as “corporatism”, seeps into all facets of our culture, including politics, education, and of course, sport.⁸

The consequence of this corporatist mentality of leadership is an inability to consistently act in ways that make a difference. We are, Saul contends, incapacitated to act, incapable of action, and often unable to even agree on what problems exist.⁹ In other words, we have generally, and within sport particularly, a leadership void.

Cultural Malaises and the Leadership Void

The source of our limited understanding of leadership finds its roots in what Charles Taylor identifies as the three “cultural malaises” infecting modern societies.¹⁰ For example, rather than appreciating and cultivating the irreducible social quality of individual existence, modern cultures tend to, in Taylor’s language, “slide to subjectivism”. While Taylor defends the unique process of “finding one’s own original way of being,” he laments the deviation of this powerful moral ideal into a version reductively grounded in atomism, the subjective, individualism, and self-defining freedom. Taylor, echoing the ideas of pragmatism, contends that cultures fail to recognize individuality as accomplished through dialogue and relationships against the backdrop of a shared “horizon of significance”.¹¹

Secondly, Taylor (as well as Dewey and Saul) argues that we live reason today not in the service of flesh and blood humanity, but amorally for “pure” reasons grounded in a reductive instrumental (corporatist) mentality.¹² Most today have lost faith in or fail to see the power of ideas and no longer recognize that moral sources originally fed the cultural habits driving modern societies. To address issues that challenge our human endeavours at the level of “ideas” seems too onerous or conversely ineffectual. Consequently, cultures turn away from philosophy and towards a corporatist mentality when dealing with the problems and challenges pervading our human practices. Rather than viewing philosophy as a powerful method to critique and reconstruct the ideas that fund cultures, most perceive it as out-of-touch, irrelevant, and either simplistically “commonsensical” or overly-abstract.

Finally, due to the rampant relativism and amoral instrumentality in modern culture, Taylor suggests that a third malaise dangerously grips modern cultures—the fragmentation of society. Taylor argues that within the bureaucratic states of most developed nations, citizens feel a sense of helplessness that eventually results in political and communal apathy—a sense of hopelessness and disconnect evident in voter turnout. Only political activism grounded in special interests or radicalism survives—

which Rorty contends results in ineffectual, detached spectatorship rather than active political agency.¹³ The growing divide and inability of members of cultures to engage in meaningful, consensus-seeking communication—the foundation of democracy—results in more emphasis placed upon judicial review to maintain some balance of power. Law becomes the binding arbiter of right and wrong rather than a social institution that helps meaningful dialogue get “unstuck”. Ultimately this legalistic turn results in all-or-nothing, winner-take-all solutions to social dilemmas—fragmenting culture even further. Consequently, power is distributed by obtaining a voter majority, granting large, centralized, and increasingly bureaucratized governing bodies’ control over an apathetic citizenry that believes their ideas will not make a difference. Meanwhile, dissidents focus only on their “personal cause” and work from the “outside”. Thus, a vicious spiral deepens. The idea of democracy is traded for utilitarian majority and cultural fragmentation becomes entrenched.¹⁴

One can easily see these three malaises taking hold of the world of sport. Most often, despite rhetoric suggesting otherwise, sporting cultures emphasize radical individuality, creating a disconnect between participants beyond physical proximity. The result is an increasingly narcissistic realm of individual-focused athletes, coaches, and officials. Furthermore sport, for the most part, disregards the potential instrumentality of philosophy and the cultural power of moral ideals. Participants at the highest levels of competition generally pay only lip service to the moral ideas that fund the very existence of sport. Finally, the sporting world, like wider society, tends to trade the ideal of genuine democracy for passive acquiescence to all-powerful sporting bodies. In rare instances of involvement in sport issues, legal processes, courts of arbitration and special interest agendas take precedent over engaged communication. Clearly defined winners (typically those in positions of power) and losers in these sporting debates emerge, dangerously stunting opportunities for human participants to flourish and find meaning through athletic competition.

But how does this relate to leadership? By losing sight of the moral ideals that underlie concepts such as “leadership” and “ethics”, they become the sole domain of the corporatist world—recipes, reductive descriptions, how-to-manuals. To challenge the deeply engrained corporatist attitude, ideas underlying leadership must first be re-oriented.

Pragmatic Response to the Three Malaises

Three interrelated ideas emerging from pragmatic philosophy offer a direct challenge to the cultural malaises outlined by Taylor, and ultimately create an opportunity to critique and reconstruct ideas informing our conceptions of leadership. One such pragmatic notion is the irreducible social quality of our individual existences. Challenging the “slide to subjectivism” outlined by Taylor, pragmatists suggest our social “beingness” runs far deeper than the fact most of us function in close proximity with others. Pragmatic philosophers (among others) consistently contend that our individuality is irreducibly interdependent on our transactions with others. As Stuhr writes, “existence is social in a deeper, ontologically more important sense as well; the individual is intrinsically *constituted by and in* his or her social relations; the self is fundamentally a social self.”¹⁵

Consequently, “how do I live the good life?” is always at-once an individually flavoured and socially textured question: “how do I live the good life in transaction with others?” And while individuals in different contexts, with varying experiential influences may differ in degree about ideas that define some malleable notion of what constitutes a “good life,” human flourishing cannot occur in isolation from others. Thus we are always already actively (and passively) shaped by and shaping evolving cultures. And as members of multiple ‘cultures’, each individual’s “horizon of significance” is at-once developed and transformed both uniquely and collectively—an entangled web of multiple, complex transactions with others and our environments.

Sport serves as a perfect exemplar of the irreducible social quality of our being. For instance, cooperation in sport must always precede competition. The very existence of sport relies upon participants working together to create a shared sporting experience. The success and failure of individuals or groups only emerges from this underlying idea driving sport—an activity in which participants experience athletic challenges with and through other humans and socially constructed worlds.¹⁶

A second underlying idea grounded in pragmatic thought is the contention that all cultures, large or small (and therefore all individuals), enter into, are created, funded, and perpetuated by resistant, yet malleable, moral “habits”. The values and general ideas held about their world or worlds generate these moral habits, which in turn drive the policies, beliefs, and actions of a culture. From a pragmatic perspective, this is the realm and

purpose of the philosopher—critiquing and reconstructing the ideas and values that inform and define cultures. And it is the power of ideas, pragmatic philosophers believe, that hold the potential to change our worlds. Pragmatists call this attitude meliorism—the belief that we can actively engage in an attempt to make things “better” by transforming the ideas that shape our cultures.¹⁷

This pragmatic notion challenges the cultural drift towards the primacy of instrumental reason. Rather than simply adopt reductive cost-benefit analysis procedures when addressing issues facing cultures such as sport, examination of general ideas that innervate our athletic worlds offers more tangible opportunity for real change. As such, Taylor calls for us to recognize the “shared horizons of significance” emerging from our lived experiences. What draws humans to sport? Why does a game such as soccer elicit such passion from both participants and observers alike around the world? Why can athletic performances at times blur differences among people in ways political machinations fail? The ever-changing human ideas underlying these questions ultimately serve as the source of sport’s value to society. Thus to change sport, to make it better, requires a transformation at the level of ideas funding our cultural habits—not through the instrumental activities most often emphasized.

These two pragmatic conceptions are importantly interrelated. The good life is irreducibly a social question since we are always already entangled in cultures that we define and are defined by; and the individuals that comprise cultures are constantly influencing, shifting, cementing, and upholding moral ideals that fund the conditions within which human flourishing can occur. Both of these ideas mobilize within the pragmatic understanding of “democracy”—the pragmatic response to cultural fragmentation. Pragmatists argue that instrumentally striving for the democratic ideal is the best way humans realize the “good life”. By working out the irreducible reliance on one another within cultures funded by malleable moral habits, the conditions for human meaning are best realized.

From a pragmatic perspective, democracy stands as a more complex and far-reaching idea than the traditional notion suggests. Dewey, for instance, vehemently argued that the notion of democracy involved far more than political machinery. Democratic political systems only express the political phase of the whole of democracy as the idea of democracy extends beyond the simple, utilitarian and divisive majority rules approach.¹⁸

In an essay entitled “Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us,” Dewey described it as a “way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature.”¹⁹ In a second essay, “Search for the Great Community,” Dewey defined democracy as individuals “having a responsible share according to the capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain.”²⁰

Applying the ideal of democracy to sport is a messy proposal. It first requires recognition of the durability of sports’ “habits” (i.e. conventions, rules, procedures, histories) developed through time and space; furthermore, genuine democracy demands an appreciation for the dynamism that emerges from never-ending transactions between idiosyncratic humans engaged in irreducibly shared sporting projects. Pragmatists embrace the complexity of genuine lived experience, resisting the urge to trade its disorder for clean, laboratory-like analysis. Once we accept that efforts to live lives of meaningful growth through a fully human activity like sport are always tentative and ongoing projects that grow out of the world we find ourselves within, these three pragmatic ideas become increasingly important. If cultures dismiss or discount any of these three pragmatic ideas, opportunities for human flourishing, including within sport, may diminish. Yet our modern and post-modern cultural habits seem to push us in a different direction.

Recovering Moral Leadership

Taylor’s descriptions of the malaises gripping modern culture make clear sources of leadership’s conceptual limitations. Uncritically assenting to views that result in the prioritization of radical self-interest, reductive instrumentalism, and sociopolitical disengagement, ultimately results in corporatist, reductive, cause-effect, specialized and stagnant models of leadership. Conversely, transforming ideas to recognize the social quality of our being, the importance of moral habits on our cultural activities, and the need for all to actively engage in the complex conditions that at once define and are defined by their existence, opens space to view leadership in a new light.

Accounting for these pragmatic conceptions, a working, philosophical definition for leadership can be proposed: *leadership as intelligent, purposeful activities that create the conditions for cultural growth*. Based on this working definition, anyone who intentionally acts to create

conditions for a culture and its members to realize “growth” is engaging in leadership. Acts of leadership therefore require both an understanding and appreciation of the dominant values innervating a culture, as well as an ability to creatively re-conceptualize ideas to transform the culture’s moral ideals. As Saul contends, leaders “look at things everyone else sees and then see them in a new light whereby an answer becomes obvious”.²¹

Conceived in this manner, acts of leadership in the sport realm no longer require positions of authority or power. Consequently, leadership will continue to elude reductive or finished definition at the level of particularity. Any or all deliberate acts in varying degrees can potentially be an act of leadership. And although some positions will possess greater opportunities to influence cultural habits—head coaches like Capello, club executives like Blatter, team captains like Ronaldo—even “lower participants” can cause a ripple that over time and in concert with other directed ripples, will transform the moral ideals funding a culture like sport and hence transform by genuine democratic means the members of these cultures.

Furthermore, by re-orienting our view of leadership in this way, as intentional actions that transform cultural habits, the centrality of leadership to genuine sporting democracy becomes apparent. Since individuals, cultures, and democracies are pragmatically always already works in progress striving for some ideal, acts of genuine leadership within sport mobilize others around shared meaningful projects rather than leave them to simply be manipulated by large bureaucracies or powerlessly shaped by the values imposed upon them by those with power. At the same time, democracy reciprocally makes leadership in sport possible. If sporting participants cannot engage in critical and reconstructive dialogue about the moral ideals that both bind them and empower them, opportunities for human flourishing within athletic contexts are muted.

This philosophical recovery of leadership points to something more: in order to genuinely contribute to democratic ideals, to create the conditions for growth within sport, all leadership acts must be moral. What we consider “good” or “better” can only be assessed by the “direction of change in the quality of experience.” Growth itself, pragmatists suggest, is “the only moral ‘end’”.²² Growth “as the only moral ‘end’” suggests the good life is about more than a shallow or epicurean idea of human existence—it is about making the best, most meaningful experiences through our activities such as sport possible. Consequently, the ripple

effect of even the smallest deliberate action intended to transform a culture such as sport must ideally create the conditions for growth for all members of a culture. Since individuals irreducibly transact with others within sport and are always already members of various cultures in and beyond sport, genuine democracy needs ethical leadership for all to engage in shared meaningful projects. Leaders must avoid the modern corporatist tendency of individuals operating in utilitarian versions of democracy to, as Stuhr writes, “manipulate one another, like machines, paying no attention to the quality of experience of others.”²³

To be truly ethical, leadership acts in sport must create the conditions for growth longitudinally within a group or culture, as well as laterally beyond that particular group or culture. What separates the genuine leader from the unethical, selfishly motivated figure is the intent to create the conditions for what Dewey termed the “Great Community”. “[Democracy] demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. Since every individual is a member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connection with other groups”, writes Dewey.²⁴ Thus any leadership act that transforms a sporting group or culture, but impairs the ability of other cultures or its own individual members to grow, further fragments wider society and dismantles genuine democracy—and subsequently mutes opportunities for human flourishing. This helps us understand why a historical non-sport figure such as Adolph Hitler, despite his ability to rally thousands to support his vision, fails to meet the requirements for genuine leadership.

Thinking Small to Make a Difference

But how do we know when our leadership acts create the conditions for growth and contribute to the ideals of democracy within a sport context, as well as beyond? Unfortunately, the answer is always messy and never clear cut; yet we must strive toward the ideal of truly ethical sport leadership. Only genuine communication among individuals and groups can help us realize shared horizons of significance, and thus how to move forward to creatively transform and meaningfully reconstruct our physical cultures.

Ethical leadership in sport demands involvement that moves beyond management tasks. Leadership is about intentionally transforming cultural habits that inform policy and create growth; management is about

implementing policies that embody a culture's ideals. Thus leadership requires action, it requires direction. It requires us to overcome creative inertia—the inability and unwillingness to take on challenges and see them in a different light.

But action rarely occurs when we think too big. Grand schemes to solve problems “once and for all” tend to paralyze or often prove ineffectual. Ambitious, “gigantic” plots to rid sport of all its ills, to eliminate its problems, are akin to beauty queen declarations for “world peace”—unable to ultimately generate consensus beyond a small minority and failing to rally others around a shared common purpose.²⁵ Similarly, anarchists and radical challengers of the status quo, those who want to tear social practices like sport to the ground, rarely mobilize enough support to enact real change in policy. Proudly standing as outsiders to the mechanisms that control sport, they fail to genuinely make a difference to cultural members on a daily basis.²⁶ Consequently, as Rorty argues, they exist as detached spectators sitting on the sidelines of cultural transformation.²⁷

To make a real difference in sport requires involvement—to affect change on the level of policy—without falling prey to a reductive corporatist mindset. Thus, to transform a culture such as sport, to engage in ethical acts of leadership, requires “small” thinking. Actions grounded in moral ideals that others can meaningfully rally around, slowly change cultures over time more than failed grand proposals. Thinking small from a leadership perspective does not mean we trade hope for pessimism—it means we engage in transformations of our cherished practices such as sport bit by bit. And although human failure is inevitable, incremental changes or improvements add up over time. Lachs emphasizes this Deweyan point, writing, “Dewey is satisfied with modest progress in the affairs of life. Perhaps no one should hope for more.... Not wishing for utopia, or even for universal improvement, is a sign of maturity”.²⁸ Consequently, there will never be an end to sport inquiry, never a cessation of drawing and redrawing lines around athletics.

Successful revolutions that create growth take time—always ongoing and always slowly moving forward. We cannot escape our social responsibility within the cultures such as sport we define and are defined by. To innervate other members of a culture and to generate consensus requires us to focus on what can be done to make a difference—to reconstruct our cultural ideals and mobilize us at the level of policy in order to create the

conditions for growth today. To deal with the myriad of problems facing sport, including covert uses of banned performance enhancing substances, inappropriate manipulation of game outcomes by tainted officials, instrumental violence to intimidate opponents to name a few, requires ripples that over time end as revolutions.

At the San Diego Zoo, a quote by the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke hanging on a fence reads: “No one could make a greater mistake then he who did nothing because he could do only a little”. Those of us involved in sport recognize that we face many problems—some resistant, others novel, many yet to come. To address these issues requires us to do more than manage them. It also requires directed actions. This is where leadership comes in. Whether it is dealing with issues in higher education and athletics, the ongoing debate over appropriate uses of technology, the lack of physical activity participation by youth, or the destruction of green space and parkland, leadership within our physical cultures is needed. Individuals must creatively engage in a transformation of the cultural habits that now find us frozen and unable to address these ongoing problems. We must see our problems in a new light so that answers become obvious. As ethical leaders we must think small—in order to set in motion revolutions that open space for us to live the good life through sport.

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Notes

¹ Claudia Luther, “Coach John Wooden 1910-2010,” UCLA Newsroom, <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/portal/ucla/john-wooden-dies-84109.aspx>.

² Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 1.

³ Warren G. Bennis, “Leadership Theory and Administrative Behaviour: The Problem of Authority,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 4 (1959): 259.

⁴ Ralph M. Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of the Literature* (New York: Free Press, 1974), 259.

⁵ Yukl, *Leadership*, 3

⁶ See Mike Krzyzewski and Donald T. Phillips, *Leading With the Heart: Coach K’s Successful Strategies for Basketball, Business, and Life* (New York: Warner, 2000); Pat Riley, *The Winner Within: A Life Plan for Team Players* (New York: Putnam, 1993); Dean Smith, Gerald D. Bell, and John Kilgo, *The Carolina Way: Leadership Lessons from a Life in Coaching* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

⁷ John Dewey, “Individualism: Old and New” in *John Dewey: The Later Works Volume 5 (1925-1953)*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, 66 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

⁸ See John Ralston Saul, *The Unconscious Civilization* (Toronto: Anansi, 1995), 2; Saul, “Inaugural LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture” in *The LaFontaine Baldwin Lectures: Volume One*, ed. Rudyard Griffiths, 18 (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2002).

⁹ Saul, *Unconscious Civilization*, 1-39.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1991), 1-12.

¹¹ Taylor, *Authenticity*, 31-41.

¹² Taylor, *Authenticity*, 93-108.

¹³ Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1998), 8.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Authenticity*, 109-121.

¹⁵ John J. Stuhr, ed., “Introduction,” *Pragmatism and Classic American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, 2nd ed., 7 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) (emphasis added).

¹⁶ See Scott Kretchmar and Tim Elcombe, “In Defense of Competition and Winning: Revisiting Athletic Tests and Contests” in *Ethics in Sport*, 2nd ed., ed. William J. Morgan, 187 (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007).

¹⁷ See William James, “Pragmatism and Religion” in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott, 466 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977).

¹⁸ John Dewey, “Search for The Great Community,” in *Pragmatism and Classic American Philosophy*, 505.