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FROM THE EDITORS

Robert Frost (1874-1963), one of America's most esteemed poets, underlined the country's fascination with sports when he said, "Nothing flatters me more than to have it assumed that I could write prose – unless it be to have it assumed that I once pitched a baseball with distinction." Whether poet or politician, carpenter or cardiologist, Americans from all walks of life share an abiding interest in athletic games and contests.

The freedoms to invent, adapt, and create – central to the American experience – are integral to the proliferation of sports activities in the United States and the tremendous popularity they enjoy. Sports are both a social glue bonding the country together and a vehicle for transmitting such values as justice and fair play, team work and sacrifice. They have contributed to racial and social integration, and even to the development of language, as sports terms and expressions slide into everyday usage. Sports also have been a popular focus for the arts, particularly in novels and films.

Various social rituals have grown up around athletic contests. The local high school football or basketball game represents the biggest event of the week for residents in many communities across the United States. Fans of major university and professional football teams often gather in parking lots outside stadiums to eat a picnic lunch before kickoff, and for parties in front of television sets in each other's homes during the professional championship game, the Super Bowl. Thousands of baseball fans flee the snow and ice of the North for a week or two each winter by making a pilgrimage to training camps in the South and Southwest to watch up close their favorite players prepare for the spring opening of the professional baseball season.

If sports lovers are not watching or playing a game, it is likely they are searching the Internet, tuning in a broadcast, or perusing the sports pages of the morning newspaper for the latest results of their

favorite teams and athletes. The media often use sports as a magnifying glass through which to focus on a larger social or cultural phenomenon. For instance, the *Washington Post* recently published a front-page story about a small, rural town in the western state of Montana that is struggling to keep its high school football program alive in the face of a declining local population. "If we don't have these boys playing football, we don't have anything to get together for," one resident plaintively told the *Post*.

We have attempted in this journal to relate some of the poetry and prose, so to speak, of sports in America. Three distinguished essayists – Roger Rosenblatt, John Edgar Wideman, and Joseph Epstein – bring unique and very personal observations to the meaning and value of the games that Americans play. Other writers provide contrasting views of the influence of sports across the American landscape and around the world. We explore some current social trends and developments, such as the growing involvement of women and persons with disabilities in competitive athletics, an outgrowth of federal legislation and an expanding national consciousness. We describe how coaches and players at two secondary schools in the suburbs of Chicago made provisions for Muslim team members to fast during Ramadan.

To consider the financial aspects of sports, we talk with an economist who dispels some of the myths surrounding the "bottom line" component in professional and collegiate athletics in the United States. And finally, in addition to a bibliography of books and Internet sites, we round out coverage with some lists of quotes, idioms, films, and statistics all related to our theme.

We hope we have been able to provide to readers not only interesting information about sports in America, but new insights as well into American culture and society. ■

REFLECTIONS: WHY WE PLAY THE GAME

BY ROGER ROSENBLATT

"The first time a baseball is hit, the first time a football is thrown with a spiral, the first time a boy or a girl gains the strength to push the basketball high enough into the hoop – these are national rites of passage."

There probably are countries where the people are as crazy about sports as they are in America, but I doubt that there is any place where the meaning and design of the country is so evident in its games. In many odd ways, America is its sports. The free market is an analog of on-the-field competition, apparently wild and woolly yet contained by rules, dependent on the individual's initiative within a corporate (team) structure, at once open and governed. There are no ministries of sports, as in other countries; every game is a free enterprise partially aided by government, but basically an independent entity that contributes to the national scene like any big business. The fields of play themselves simulate the wide-open spaces that eventually ran out of wide-open spaces, and so the fences came up. Now every baseball diamond, football field and basketball court is a version of the frontier, with spectators added,



Swin Cash of the Women's National Basketball Association team, the Detroit Shock, shoots and scores.

and every indoor domed stadium, a high-tech reminder of a time of life and dreams when the sky was the limit. I focus on the three sports of baseball, football, and basketball because they are indigenous to us, invented in America (whatever vague debt baseball may owe the British cricket), and central to the country's enthusiasms. Golf and tennis have their moments; track and field as well. Boxing has fewer and fewer things to cheer about these days, yet even in its heyday, it was less an American sport than a darkly entertaining exercise in universal brutality. But baseball, football, and basketball are ours – derived in unspoken ways from our ambitions and inclinations, reflective of our achievement and our losses, and our souls. They are as good and as bad as we are, and we watch them, consciously or not, as morality plays about our conflicting natures, about the best and worst of us. At heart they are our romances, our brief retrievals of national innocence. Yesterday's old score is tomorrow's illusion of rebirth. When a game is over, we are elated or defeated, and we reluctantly re-enter our less heightened lives, yet always driven by hope, waiting for the next game or for next year. But from the beginning of a game to its end,

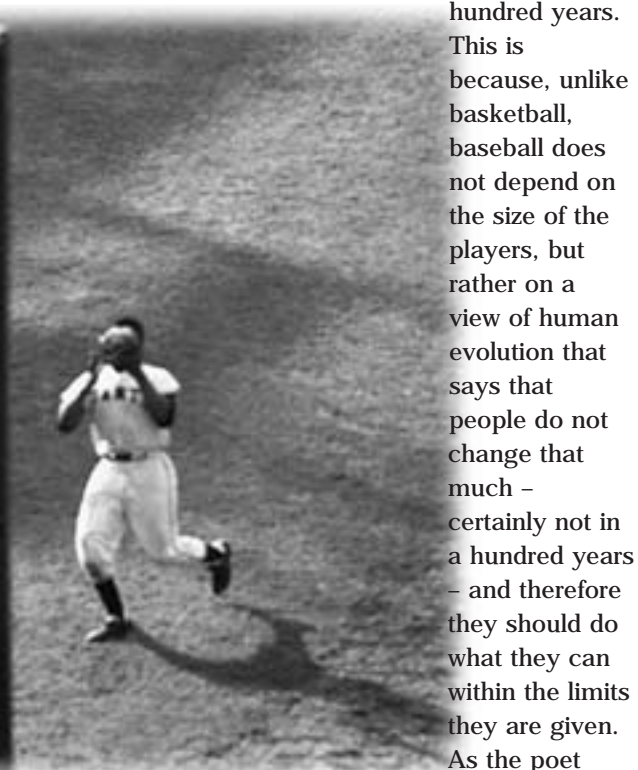


America can see itself played out by representatives in cleats or shorts or shoulder pads. Not that such fancy thoughts occur during the action. Part of being an American is to live

without too much introspection. It is in the undercurrents of the sports that one feels America, which may be why the attraction of sports is both clear-cut (you win or you lose) and mysterious (you win and you lose).

Of the three principal games, baseball is both the most elegantly designed and the easiest to account for in terms of its appeal. It is a game played within strict borders, and of strict dimensions – a distance so many feet from here to there, a pitcher's mound so many inches high, the weight of the ball, the weight of the bat, the poles that determine in or out, what counts and does not, and so forth. The rules are unbending; indeed, with a very few exceptions, the game's rules have not changed in a

One of the great defensive plays in baseball history was New York Giants centerfielder Willie Mays' over-the-shoulder catch of a fly ball in the deep outfield of the Polo Grounds in the 1954 World Series.



hundred years. This is because, unlike basketball, baseball does not depend on the size of the players, but rather on a view of human evolution that says that people do not change that much – certainly not in a hundred years – and therefore they should do what they can within the limits they are given. As the poet

Richard Wilbur wrote: “The strength of the genie comes from being in a bottle.”

And still, functioning within its limits, first and last, baseball is about the individual. In other sports, the ball does the scoring. In baseball, the person scores.

The game was designed to center on Americans in our individual strivings. The runner on first base has a notion to steal second. The first baseman has a notion to slip behind him. The pitcher has a notion to pick him off, but he delivers to the plate where the batter swings to protect the runner who decides to go now, and the second baseman braces himself to make the tag if only the catcher can rise to the occasion and put a low, hard peg on the inside of the bag. One doesn't need to know



Baseball Pitcher Tanyon Sturtze delivers the ball.

what these things mean to recognize that they all test everyone's ability to do a specific job, to make a personal decision, and to improvise.

Fans cling to the glory moments of the game's history, especially the heroic names and heroic deeds (records and statistics). America holds dear all its sports heroes because the country does not have the long histories of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Lacking an Alexander the Great or a Charlemagne, it draws its heroic mythology from sports.

We also cherish the game's sublime moments because such memories preserve everybody's youth as part of America's continuing, if a bit strained, need to remain in a perpetual summer. The illusion of the game is that it will go on forever. (Baseball is the only sport in which a team, down by a huge deficit, with but one hitter left, can still win.) In the 1950s, one of the game's greatest players, Willie Mays of the New York Giants, made a legendary catch of a ball hit to the deepest part of one of the largest stadiums, going away from home plate, over his shoulder. It was not only that Willie turned his back and took off, it was the green continent of grass on which he ran and the waiting to see if he would catch up with the ball and the reek of your sweat and of everyone else's who sat like Seurat's pointillist dots in the stadium, in the carved-out bowl of a planet that shines pale in daylight, bright purple and emerald at night.

The game always comes back to the fundamental confrontation of pitcher and batter, with the catcher involved as the only player who faces the field and sees the whole game; he presides as a masked god squatting. The pitcher's role is slyer than the batter's, but the batter's is more human. The pitcher plays offense and defense simultaneously. He labors to tempt and to deceive. The batter cannot know what is coming. He can go down swinging or looking at a strike



American football is marked by progress gained inch by inch. Quarterback Donovan McNabb scrambles to advance the ball.

and be made to appear the fool. Yet he has a bat in his hands. And if all goes well and he can accomplish that most difficult feat in sports by hitting a small, hard sphere traveling at over ninety miles per hour with a heavy rounded stick, well then, fate is thwarted for a moment and the power over life is his. The question ought not to be, "Why do the greatest hitters connect successfully only a third of the time?" It ought to be, "How do they get a hit at all?"

Still, the youth and hope of the game constitute but one half of baseball, and thus one half of its meaning to us. It is the "second summer" of the baseball season that reveals the game's complete nature. The second summer does not have the blithe optimism of the first half of the season. Each year, from August to the World Series in October, a sense of mortality begins to lower over the game – a suspicion that will deepen by late September to a certain knowledge that something that was bright, lusty, and overflowing with possibility can come to an end.

The beauty of the game is that it traces the arc of American life, of American innocence eliding into experience. Until mid-August, baseball is a boy in shorts whooping it up on the fat grass, afterwards it becomes a leery veteran with a sun-baked neck, whose main concern is to protect the plate. In its second summer, baseball is about fouling off death.

Sadaharu Oh, the Babe Ruth of Japanese baseball, wrote an ode to his sport in which he praised the warmth of the sun and foresaw the approaching change to "the light of winter coming."

Small wonder that baseball produces more fine literature than any other sport. American writers – novelists Ernest Hemingway, John Updike, Bernard Malamud, and poet Marianne Moore – have seen the nation of dreams in the game. The country's violation of its dreams lies here too. Like

America itself, baseball fought against integration until Jackie Robinson, the first Major League African American, stood up for all that the country wanted to believe. America, too, resisted its own self-proclaimed destiny to be the country of all the people and then, when it did strive to become the country of all the people – black, Asian, Latino, everyone – the place improved. Baseball also improved.

On mute display in baseball is the design of the U.S. Constitution itself. The basic text of the Constitution is the main building, a symmetrical 18th-century structure grounded in the Enlightenment's principles of reason, optimism, order, and a wariness of emotion and passion. The Constitution's architects, all fundamentally British Enlightenment minds, sought to build a house that Americans could live in without toppling it by placing their impulses above their rationality. But the trouble with that original body of laws was that it was too stable, too rigid. Thus, the Founders came up with the Bill of Rights, which in baseball's terms may be seen as the encouragement of individual freedom within hard and fast laws. Baseball is at once classic and romantic. So is America. And both the country and the sport survive by keeping the two impulses in balance.

If baseball represents nearly all the country's qualities in equilibrium, football and basketball show where those qualities may be exaggerated, overemphasized, and frequently distorted. Football and basketball are not beautifully made sports. They are more chaotic, more subject to wild moments. And yet, it should be noted that both are far more popular than baseball, which may suggest that Americans, having established the rules, are always straining to break them.

Football, like baseball, is a game of individual

progress within borders. But unlike baseball, individual progress is gained inch by inch, down and dirty. Pain is involved. The individual fullback or halfback who carries the ball endures hit after hit as he moves forward, perhaps no more than a foot at a time. Often he is pushed back. Ten yards seems a short distance yet, as in a war, it often means victory or defeat.

The ground game is operated by the infantry; the throwing game by the air force. Or one may see the game in the air as the function of the "officers" of the team – those who throw and catch – as opposed to the dog-faced linesmen in the trenches, those

literally on the line. These analogies to war are hardly a stretch. The spirit of the game, the terminology, the uniforms themselves, capped by protective masks and helmets, invoke military operations. Injuries (casualties) are not exceptions in this sport;

they are part of the game.

And yet football reflects our conflicting attitudes toward war. Generally, Americans are extremely reluctant to get into a war, even when our leaders are not. We simply want to win and get out as soon as possible. At the start of World War II, America ranked 27th in armaments among the nations of the world. By the war's end, we were number one, with second place nowhere in sight. But we only got in to crush gangsters and get it over with. Thus, football is war in its ideal state, war in a box. It lasts four periods. A fifth may be added because of a tie, and ended in "sudden death." But unless something freakish occurs, no warrior really dies.

Not only do the players resemble warriors; the fans go dark with fury. American football fans may not be as lethal as European football (soccer) fans, yet every Sunday fans dress up like ancient Celtic warriors with painted faces and half-naked bodies in midwinter.

**FROM ESSAYIST AND HUMORIST GARRISON KEILLOR
HAPPY TO BE HERE, 1981**

"My dad also taught me to throw from the shoulder – a smooth, unexaggerated motion, with a snap of the wrist to put heat on the ball. I say you can tell something about a man's character from his throwing motion, and I appreciate all my dad did to make an honest man of me. I throw well today, years later, but I'm still shy around a pop fly and wish it were hit to somebody else."

Here is no sport for the upper classes. Football was only that in the Ivy League colleges of the 1920s and 1930s. Now, the professional game belongs largely to the working class. It makes a statement for the American who works with his hands, who gains his yardage with great difficulty and at great cost. The game is not without its niceties; it took a sense of invention to come up with a ball whose shape enables it to be both kicked and thrown. But basically this is a game of grunts and bone breakage and battle plans (huddles) that can go wrong. It even has the lack of clarity of war. A play occurs, but it is not official until the referee says so. Flags indicating penalties come late, a play may be nullified, called back, and all the excitement of apparent triumph can be deflated by an exterior judgment, from a different perspective.

Where football shows America essentially, though, is the role of the quarterback. My son Carl, a former sports writer for *The Washington Post*, pointed out to me that unlike any other sport, football depends almost wholly on the ability of a single individual. In other team sports, the absence of a star may be compensated for, but in football the quarterback is everything. He is the American leader, the hero, the general, who cannot be replaced by teamwork. He speaks for individual initiative, and individual authority. And just as the president – the Chief Executive of the land – has more power than those in the other branches of government that are supposed to keep him in check, so the quarterback is the president of the game. Fans worship or deride him with the same emotional energy they give to U.S. presidents.

As for the quarterback himself, he has to be what the American individual must be to succeed – both imaginative and stable – and he must know when to be which. If the plays he orchestrates are too wild, too frequently improvised, he fails. If they are too predictable, he fails. All the nuances of American

individualism fall on his shoulders and he both demonstrates and tests the system in which the individual entrepreneur counts for everything and too much.

The structure of basketball, the least well-made game of our three, depends almost entirely on the size of the players, therefore on the individual. Over the years, the dimensions of the court have changed because players were getting bigger and taller; lines were changed; rules about dunking the ball changed, and changed back for the same reason. Time periods are different for professionals and collegians, as is the time allowed in which a shot must be taken. Some other rules are different as well. The game of basketball begins and ends with the individual and with human virtuosity. Thus, in a way, it is the most dramatically American sport in its emphasis on freedom.

Integration took far less time in basketball than in the other two major American sports because early on it became the inner city game, and very popular among African Americans. But the pleasure in watching a basketball game derives from the qualities of sport removed from questions of race. Here is a context where literal upward mobility is demonstrated in open competition. Black or white, the best players make the best passes, block the most shots, score the most points.

Simulating other American structures, both corporate and governmental, the game also demonstrates how delicate is the balance between individual and team play. Extraordinary players of the past such as Oscar Robertson, Walt Frazier, and Bill Russell showed that the essence of basketball was teamwork; victory required looking for the player in the best position for a shot, and getting the ball to him. A winning team was a selfless team. In recent years, most professional teams have abandoned that idea in favor of the exceptional talents of an individual, who is sometimes a showboat. Yet it has been



For American kids, the games start early.

proved more often than not that if the individual leaves the rest of the team behind, everybody loses.

The deep appeal of basketball in America lies in the fact that the poorest of kids can make it rich, and that there is a mystery in how he does it. Neither baseball nor football creates the special, jazzed-up excitement of this game in which the human body can be made to do unearthly things, to defy gravity gracefully. A trust in mystery is part of the foolishly beautiful side of the American dream, which actually believes that the impossible is possible.

This belief goes to the heart of sports in America. It begins early in one's life with a game of catch, or tossing a football around, or kids shooting basketballs in a playground. The first time a baseball is hit, the first time a football is thrown with a spiral, the first time a boy or a girl gains the strength to push the basketball high enough into the hoop – these are national rites of passage. In a way, they indicate how one becomes an American whether one was born here or not.

Of course, what is a grand illusion may also be spoiled. The business of sports may detract from its sense of play. The conflicts between rapacious owners and rapacious players may leave fans in the

lurch. The fans themselves may behave so monstrously as to poison the game. Professionalism has so dominated organized sports in schools that children are jaded in their views of the games by the time they reach high school. Like sports, America was conceived within a fantasy of human perfection. When that fantasy collides with the realities of human limitations, the disappointment can be embittering.

Still, the fantasy remains – of sports and of nations. America only succeeds in the world, and with itself, when it approaches its own stated ambitions, when it yearns to achieve its purest form. The same is true of its sports. Both enterprises center on an individual rising to the top and raising others up with him, toward a higher equality and a victory for everybody. This is why we play the games. ■



Roger Rosenblatt is a journalist, author, playwright, and professor. As an essayist for Time magazine, he has won numerous print journalism honors, including two George Polk Awards, as well as awards from the Overseas Press Club and the American Bar Association. The essays he presents on the public television network in the United States have gained him the prestigious Peabody and Emmy awards. He is the author, most recently, of Where We Stand: 30 Reasons for Loving Our Country, and Rules for Aging: A Wry and Witty Guide to Life.

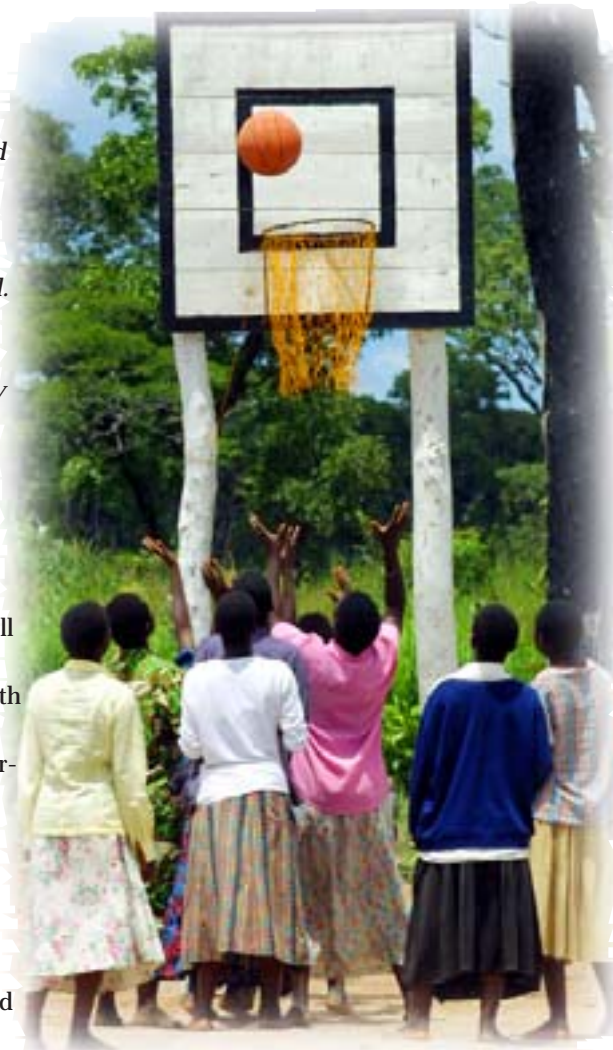
GAMES FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

BY DAVID GOLDINER

Baseball and basketball, and to a lesser extent American football, have captured the imagination of athletes and sports fans around the world. In the U.S. professional and university leagues, foreign-born players are increasingly making their marks in those games as well as in ice hockey, soccer, and other sports.

On a dusty basketball court outside Johannesburg, South Africa, this past September, Michel Los Santos, a 17-year-old boy from Angola, drilled one long-range shot after another into the basket. Powerfully built Nigerian center Kenekwue Obi, 15, huffing and puffing after grabbing a rebound, admitted he had touched a basketball for the first time only three months earlier. Rail-thin Cheikh Ahmadou Bemba Fall said most of his friends in the Senegalese port city of St. Louis play basketball in bare feet.

The three players were among 100 young African talents who gathered at the U.S. National Basketball



Congolese girls shoot hoops in a refugee camp in Zambia.

Association's (NBA) first-ever professional development camp on the continent.

All-Star center Dikembe Mutombo, who himself was plucked from obscurity in Zaire 15 years ago, tutored the youngsters with some basic moves — and offered invaluable words of encouragement. “I want them to know that they can make it to another level if you want to push yourself,” said Mutombo, who frequently visits his homeland, which is now called the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“The NBA is becoming a global game,” said Mutombo, who now plays for the NBA's New York Knicks team. “In the past, soccer would be most popular, but today, in any country, young kids will recognize, in two

seconds, 10 NBA players. The league should be proud of that success.”

Armed with visions of fame and million-dollar contracts to play ball in the United States, the 100 players came from poverty-stricken townships of

South Africa, crowded cities of Nigeria, and the edge of the Sahara Desert.

Will any of them ever see their dreams fulfilled? Maybe not. But their very presence at the camp, not to mention the stands packed with sports agents and scouts, demonstrates the growing global reach of American sports. Basketball, baseball, American football, and ice hockey are now multi-billion dollar industries that promote themselves — and recruit new talent — in the four corners of the world.

A TWO-WAY STREET

The phenomenon is an unusual cultural two-way street: American sports are beamed around the world by omnipresent TV and Internet connections. In return, foreign stars have flooded onto the fields, courts, and rinks of the U.S. pro leagues and major colleges in recent years like never before.

Jaromir Jagr, the high-scoring wing for the Washington Capitals hockey team, has led a veritable invasion of talented players from East Europe and the former Soviet Union. In baseball, slugger Sammy Sosa is just one of dozens of stars from the Dominican Republic to make their mark on Major League Baseball. Japanese stars like Ichiro Suzuki and Koreans like Chan Ho Park have boosted the sport's popularity in the Pacific Rim.

Chinese basketball center Yao Ming, high-scoring forward Dirk Nowitzki from Germany, and Brazilian Nene Hilario have emerged from little-known basketball backwaters to star in the NBA. Female track stars have made their mark in college athletics and female basketball stars — buoyed by the popularity of women's basketball in countries like Portugal and Brazil — have internationalized the new Women's National Basketball Association, or WNBA.

"It's now a game for the whole world," said Serbian-born center Vlade Divac, who plays for the Sacramento Kings.

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

It wasn't always that way. American scouts and trainers were once lonely altruists helping athletes in developing countries for the love of the game.

Track star Mal Whitfield won three Olympic gold medals in the 1948 and 1952 Games. With the Cold War raging, the U.S. government decided to send world-class American athletes on goodwill missions around the world and picked Whitfield to be one of the first such ambassadors.

Whitfield, now 79 and retired, spent much of the next four decades traveling the globe and training young track stars. He even lived in countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Egypt under the then U.S. Information Agency's Sports America program. The result was a harvest of good will for America — and a bounty of Olympic medals for African athletes. He trained legends like distance runner Kip Keino of Kenya, who took home two gold medals, and hurdler John Akii-Bua of Uganda, who won a gold in 1972.

Whitfield also inspired a second wave of American coaches to teach in — and learn from — Africa, including Ron Davis, who became a national track coach in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Mauritius.

"I know the meaning of sports," Whitfield said in a 1996 interview. "All Americans have a job to do. I just happen to be one proud American."

The successes, in addition to producing a wave of medals for Olympic athletes, triggered an influx of athletes from developing nations to American

universities, which typically set aside a set number of scholarships for a variety of sports, even some less popular ones such as wrestling, fencing, and track. But the exposure failed to dent America's major professional sports leagues, which were overwhelmingly dominated by U.S.-born athletes.

THE CHARISMA OF ONE PLAYER

About two decades ago, the picture started to change. Foreign audiences started tuning into American pro



Mal Whitfield was one of America's first goodwill sports ambassadors overseas.

sports, especially basketball, in previously unheard of numbers. Teenagers snapped up player jerseys and stayed up past midnight to watch games on live television. Soon, they were imitating the moves on their own courts and fields.

So what happened? In two words: Michael Jordan.

More than any single athlete, Jordan, the magnetic and charismatic Chicago Bulls superstar, transformed American sports into a global phenomenon. Jordan's soaring dunks and graceful athleticism made him a worldwide poster child for the American dream. Starting in the late 1980s, he drew hundreds of millions of dollars into the sport and became one of the most recognized persons in the world.

"Michael made it matter all over the world," Indianapolis Star columnist Bob Kravitz wrote in an article celebrating Jordan's retirement last season.

Of course, American stars have long been global cultural icons. In music, Michael Jackson and Madonna sold millions of albums worldwide. Actors like Eddie Murphy and Richard Gere became household names from Delhi to Dakar. But the massive exposure of American sports did more than just sell jerseys - it brought a powerful new pool of talent to the game.

One day in 1995, a tall kid named Maybyner (Nene) Hilario watched an NBA game on TV in his family's cramped home outside the industrial city of Sao Carlos, Brazil. The next day he skipped his usual soccer game and played a pickup game on a makeshift court created from a basket mounted on a battered car in an empty lot. Hilario, now 21, dunked the ball with such force, he brought down the hoop. Now, he is playing for the Denver Nuggets.

Half a world away, Mwadi Mabika would sit for hours watching boys play basketball on a dirt court in front of her family's home in Kinshasa, Democratic

Republic of Congo. The boys would taunt the eight-year-old girl, telling her she could shoot the ball for five minutes if she swept sand off the court.

"So I would clean it, but sometimes they wouldn't give me the ball," said Mwadi, now a star with the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks.

In a smoke-filled gymnasium in the Serbian town of Vrsac, a bony 14-year-old named Darko Milicic was practicing with a new team that lured him with a \$100-a-month salary. Suddenly, air raid sirens ripped through the air and explosions rang out as NATO warplanes launched the bombing campaign to force Serbia out of the restive province of Kosovo. The

frightened players stopped in their tracks and peered over at their coach, who shouted at them to keep playing. The results of stories like these are written indelibly on the rosters of pro teams. In 1990, 20 foreign-born players played in the NBA. Last

season there were 68.

AMERICAN FOOTBALL IN EUROPE

American football has also seen an international boom, albeit on a smaller scale. For years, the National Football League (NFL) had recruited soccer-playing foreigners as kickers, including legends like Morten Anderson of Denmark, South African Gary Anderson, and Portugal-born Olindo Mare. But non-U.S. players remained rare in a sport that was largely unknown outside of North America.

The international profile of American football got a boost from the launch of the NFL Europe league, which provides an opportunity for some European neophytes to play against somewhat lesser American professional talents. Many of the foreigners — 90 made preseason rosters in the NFL this season — are sons of immigrants from places like Mexico or West

**FROM WRITER, EDUCATOR, AND HISTORIAN JACQUES BARZUN
God's Country and Mine, 1954**

"Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game."

Africa.

Adewale Ogunleye's parents, natives of Nigeria, tried to steer him away from football, with its hard hitting, and its helmets and pads. "They thought it was barbaric," he said recently. But growing up in New York City, he stuck with the sport and now is a star defensive lineman for the Miami Dolphins.

Antonio Rodriguez, who is trying to land a spot with the Houston Texans team, said his Mexican friends didn't believe him when he told them he was playing football in college. "They thought . . . I meant soccer," said Rodriguez.

For ice hockey, the biggest barrier to playing in the United States was always political. The sport had the advantage of already being hugely popular in countries across northern and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. But for decades, Communist governments prevented star players from leaving their countries or signing pro contracts.

"They didn't allow people to think freely or do whatever they wanted," said former Soviet Olympic hero Vyacheslav Fetisov.

"They wanted the control of

FROM COLONIAL TIMES

Team sports were an early manifestation of life in colonial North America. Predecessor games to modern-day baseball and soccer were popular among the colonists in the early 18th century, decades before America's Declaration of Independence in 1776. By the mid-1800s, they had taken on the formal rules and regulations that largely govern those games today.

American football and basketball came along a short time later.

Football seems to have roots in games played in ancient Greece and medieval England. Many historians pinpoint its American origin to a game played between 25-man teams from Rutgers and Princeton universities in the state of New Jersey in 1869. Football authorities eliminated many of its rougher aspects at the urging of President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-09), and team size was reduced over the years to the 11-man game that is the standard today.

Basketball is uniquely American. In 1891, James Naismith, a physical education teacher at what is now Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts, was instructed by his boss to invent a game that could be played indoors during the cold winter months. Naismith had two bushel baskets, used for carrying peaches, nailed to the balcony at opposite ends of the school's gymnasium. He set up two nine-man teams, gave them a soccer ball, and told them the object was to toss it into the basket being defended by the opposing team. He called the game Basket Ball, the modern version of which is played in practically every country throughout the world.

Ice hockey came from Canada in the late 1800s. Soccer was always played -- as was lacrosse, a game inherited from American Indians -- but on a smaller scale than the big-three team sports of baseball, basketball, and American football. In recent years, however, soccer has seen tremendous growth in popularity. Some 3.9 million boys and girls now play the game, mostly in suburban leagues that have produced many world-class players. Lacrosse, once primarily played in states along the northeastern coast of the United States, has also spread throughout the country.

Individual competitions accompanied the growth of team sports. Shooting and fishing contests were part of the colonial experience, as were boxing, running, and horse racing. Golf and tennis emerged in the 1800s. Recent decades have given birth to a wide variety of challenging activities and contests such as sail boarding, mountain biking, and sport climbing, collectively referred to as "extreme sports."

the people. . . . It was scary."

All that changed as the Iron Curtain started to collapse in the late 80s, setting off a stampede of players from Russia. Fetisov, the first to leave, went on to win two Stanley Cups with the Detroit Red Wings. He was followed by flashy scorer, Pavel Bure, and puck-handler Sergei Zubov, who grew up playing hockey on the frozen ponds of Moscow.

"I knew about NHL (National Hockey League), but I never had any thought to play there," Zubov said. "We didn't think that way." Now, more than 60 players from the former Soviet Union play in the NHL.

The Russians were followed by Jagr, who grew up milking cows on a farm in the Czech Republic and chose the number 68 to honor his country's resistance during the Soviet invasion of 1968. Jagr says his number "is about history, in Czech."

THE LATIN AMERICANIZATION OF BASEBALL

American baseball didn't have to look across the Atlantic for a vast pool of

new talent. It was right there for anyone to see in the sugar cane fields and hardscrabble city lots of Latin American countries like Venezuela, Panama, and, especially, the Dominican Republic.

For decades, a trickle of Latin players - Mexican pitcher Fernando Valenzuela and Dominican curveball wizard Juan Marichal - gave baseball fans a taste of the panache and talent that lay south of the border. In the past decade, the tap has opened up and now more than a quarter of all Major League Baseball players were born outside the United States.

It didn't take TV exposure or the Internet to show young Dominicans like slugger Sammy Sosa or pitcher Pedro Martinez how to play ball. *Beisbol* has been the island's favorite game ever since it was brought to its shores more than a century ago.

Sosa grew up selling oranges and shining shoes on the streets of San Pedro de Macoris, a baseball-mad port city outside the capital of Santo Domingo. His neck-and-neck battle with Mark McGwire to break the single season homerun record in 1998 - won by McGwire - opened even more eyes to the limitless untapped talent in the Dominican Republic. Today, virtually every major league team has its own training

academy on the island and others are scouring Panama, Venezuela, and Central America for new stars.

Cuba, with some of the best talent anywhere, could prove to be an even richer pool of talent, but Fidel Castro's Communist government still does its best to keep stars from leaving. The far East is also a potent new market, as evidenced by the Japanese and even Korean stars trooping to the United States to prove their mettle.

All the statistics and long-term trends meant little to Los Santos, the Angolan teenager who showed off his stuff at the NBA camp in South Africa. On a continent where sneakers and balls are a luxury, Los Santos counts himself lucky to play in a league with coaches and paved courts in the war-ravaged capital of Luanda. Like millions of kids around the world, he sees his talent as a long-shot ticket to rags-to-riches success in America.

"I want to go to college," Los Santos said, flashing a smile. "Then I want money and fame." ■

David Goldiner is a writer and reporter for the New York Daily News.

WOMEN IN SPORTS

BY CLAIRE SMITH

Girls and women are participating as never before in all levels of organized sports in the United States, thanks to changing public attitudes and a landmark piece of federal legislation.

When C. Vivian Stringer, in the beginning stages of what has become a Hall of Fame career, saw her women's basketball team from tiny Cheyney State College in Pennsylvania qualify in 1982 for the first-ever women's national championship sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), it was like reaching for the moon.

If the event was merely new and uncharted territory for the NCAA, the leading organization that governs intercollegiate athletics in the United States and that, for years, had sponsored every high-profile men's championship tournament, it was unprecedented in women's ranks.

Even for the most celebrated names in women's basketball, achievements had always occurred well under the radar of major college men's sports, with their generous donors and revenue-earning television exposure. So to qualify for that first championship, Stringer's team had to, well, get there.

The road from rural southeastern Pennsylvania to the inaugural event, held on the Norfolk, Virginia, campus of Old Dominion University, had many stops along the way for bake sales, raffles, pleas for donations, and any other fundraising technique Stringer and the team from the historically black college could devise.

"I remember going to a church to solicit money so that we could have little white C's sewn on our sweaters so we'd look nice getting on airplanes," Stringer said of the long road to that first title game in which Cheyney State lost to storied Louisiana Tech. "A sporting goods store volunteered to give us uniforms so that we'd have more than one set. Our administration solicited local companies. On campus, there was as much a fear of our being

successful than not, because there was always the thought, "How are we going to pay to go to the next round?"

Now, fast-forward to the year 2000. Stringer was coaching her current team, nationally ranked Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey. When Rutgers upset the University of Georgia in the NCAA Western Conference finals, it meant a third trip for Stringer to the "final four" – the championship round of games involving the four surviving teams. By then, the coach learned, the mode of transportation for such teams was very much first-class in every way.

MEDIA AND CROWDS

Life at the top for such women's teams, at the dawn of the 21st century, was nothing short of top-of-the-line. Women athletes not only had access to national television audiences – and national television funding – but also expected, and received, staples that once were the sole province of the men's basketball teams. These included, in addition to major media coverage, custom-built team buses, chartered air travel, first-rate hotel lodging and – not the least of the benefits – loyal fan bases. In fact, the "final four" destination in 2000 was not a sleepy college campus, but metropolitan Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where a sparkling new professional sports facility, with its 20,000 seats, stood ready to receive the women athletes and their enthusiastic followers.

Capacity crowds turned out to see not only Rutgers, but also several superlative, nationally renowned squads – such as the University of Tennessee and the University of Connecticut, the modern-day basketball dynasty that has become something akin to the Beatles of a generation ago

when it comes to popularity among prepubescent girls. Nationally televised in prime time, the two-day weekend event was completely sold out. The semi-final round brought out the largest crowd ever to ever see a college game – women’s or men’s – in Pennsylvania’s history, as well as a record number of reporters, sportscasters, and other members of the media.

Looking back, Stringer, now a member of the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame, recalls that weekend as a major development. “To walk in and see that giant arena filled, to see the impact of the sport in Philadelphia and elsewhere, was something you never would have dreamed of in 1982,” she said.

Women’s sports have changed dramatically on so many levels in recent decades. To be sure, there have been bumps in the road; one was the recent demise of the professional Women’s United Soccer Association, the result of low revenue and sagging ticket sales.

Yet despite such setbacks, the growth of women’s sports – from youth programs to secondary school and university levels and on to professional leagues and competitions – can only be described as phenomenal.

Surely, tennis legends Althea Gibson and Billie Jean King never might have envisioned the success, worldwide recognition, and unprecedented earnings of today’s women tennis stars like Serena and Venus Williams. Legendary golfer Babe Didrikson Zaharias could not have foreseen the explosion in popularity of women’s golf, with its galaxy of international stars such as Annika Sorenstam of Sweden and Se Ri Pak of South Korea.

THE IMPETUS OF TITLE IX

The dramatic floodtide of talented women athletes onto American playing fields – and the opportunities that came along with them – no doubt benefited from the women’s movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, with its emphasis on self-empowerment at every level. But the true impetus was Title IX, the landmark U.S. Government legislation signed by President Richard Nixon in 1972 that guaranteed equal rights for girls and women in every aspect of education, including athletics.

As colleges and universities began to enforce the



Mia Hamm (left), U.S. soccer star, testifies before Congress alongside a sports executive and a high school field hockey player. All underscore women’s expanded role in sports in America.

law, partnerships arose between women athletes and the many institutions that drive sports in the United States – among them the NCAA, the Olympics, and television. Once the world of amateur athletics for women opened up, so, too, did the doorway to corporate America, which led to more and more

sponsorship for professional women’s sports.

Many will debate whether Title IX has ever been properly or fully enforced, let alone realized to its fullest intent. Clearly football and men’s basketball remain the towering forces on the nation’s campuses. There’s an argument, too, that Title IX fueled, rather than calmed, a gender war, with evidence that the enforcement of the law may have had a detrimental effect on men’s sports; a 2002 U.S. General Accounting Office study last year found that 311 men’s wrestling, swimming, and tennis teams were eliminated from American university varsity sports programs between 1982 to 1999.

Hot button issue or not, Title IX still stands. In July 2003, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) issued a report, based on a year-long review, in which it reaffirmed Title IX’s existing compliance rules and

regulations, with only slight changes in emphasis.

Recent evidence of the determination across the United States to take Title IX seriously can be found in the November 2003 decision by a federal judge in Pennsylvania ordering a university in his jurisdiction to reinstate its varsity women's gymnastic program. Because of budgetary shortfalls and a cut in state funding, West Chester University had eliminated the program in April 2003, along with the men's lacrosse team. But the men's squad was much larger; as a result, the court found, the university did not meet its legal obligation to accommodate women athletes proportionately under Title IX. Gymnastics is part of the school's athletic landscape once more.

Arguments as to the law's merits and tangential effects likely never will go away. It is a debate for the ages. What is not debatable is this: Title IX changed the sports landscape in America forever.

**FROM NOVELIST RITA MAE BROWN
SUDDEN DEATH, 1983**

"Sport strips away personality, letting the white bone of character shine through. Sport gives players an opportunity to know and test themselves. The great difference between sport and art is that sport, like a sonnet, forces beauty within its own system. Art, on the other hand, cyclically destroys boundaries and breaks free."

'WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL!'

A stunning example is the professional Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). It exists with glitter and glamor that girls could not have imagined 30 years ago, in major-league cities and state-of-the-art arenas. Members of the two-time world champion Los Angeles Sparks, that city's women's team, garner as much "show time," as their players might say, on any given game day in the plush downtown Staples Center as the men who play for the Lakers, the National Basketball Association (NBA) team that sponsors the Sparks.

"When you walk into Madison Square Garden to see the New York Liberty, you take a step back and say, 'this is women's professional basketball!'" Stringer said of New York's WNBA entry. "There are just some things I could not have envisioned."

As much as Title IX allowed for the trickle-up effect, it also unleashed a cascade of opportunity onto the playing fields where young girls now do more than merely observe, or lead cheers. Statistics speak loudly: According to the Women's Sports

Foundation, a nonprofit advocacy group, before Title IX was enacted, only one in 27 girls participated in sports at the secondary school level. The foundation now puts that number at one in every three girls. And as the teenagers have moved on, so has their interest in sports. DOE statistics show that today, some 150,000 young women are involved in collegiate sports – five times the 32,000 who were estimated to have participated in varsity sports on the college level in 1972.

There are undeniable success stories behind the myriad statistics. For instance, it was rowing – not basketball, soccer, or softball – that first propelled

women to an unprecedented status at the NCAA level. In January 1996, the NCAA elevated its women's rowing division to championship status, but did not do the same for the men. That decision meant not only that the NCAA agreed to fund the

sport's national championship, but also that rowing – historically enjoying strong participation by both men and women – only has NCAA sanction and championship status for its women's crews.

Nikki Franke is living proof of the quieter successes that are telling in their lasting impact. Franke, a former Olympian and the longtime coach of the renowned fencing program at Temple University in Philadelphia, traces the growth of her women's team directly to Title IX. In 1972, the year Title IX went into effect, the school elevated fencing from the club level to a team sport for women. "There were no scholarships at the time, but they had a team," Franke said. "That's how it all started." Today, she observes, with all the status her squad has achieved, there are "walk-ons," young women with no history of competition at secondary school levels. And they are accepted, just as they are on men's teams. "If a lady wants to work hard and learn," Franke notes, "we will work with her."

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

But challenges remain. Gender remains an issue in coaching ranks. Wanting to be like the men in some ways has meant turning the women's sports over to the men. Yes, Franke can point to an unending string of successes. She can also point to a lonely legacy. As of 2002, Franke was one of only three women serving as head coach of the top 10-ranked fencing teams. "What I wish I would like to see a lot more women involved, more coaches on all levels," said Stringer. "We need to encourage more women in that regard."

resulted from an inability to build corporate support and sponsorships at a time when the U.S. economy turned downward. Its demise was a bitter disappointment.

"It's frustrating," said Lynn Morgan, a former WUSA executive, at the time of the association's folding. "You put in so much effort and so much investment but the needle moves so slowly. You see the potential, but you just can't make the quantum leap to get there."

What is left, in professional league ranks, is the 14-team WNBA, in partnership with the NBA, supported



Head women's basketball coach Jennifer Rizzotti, of the University of Hartford, exemplifies inroads made by women in U.S. sports.

The women's game in the United States also needs more women as consumers – to bring the full weight of their spending dollars to bear – particularly at a time when women have increased their presence geometrically as wage-earners in the United States. The downfall of the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) – with its stellar athletes –

passionately by NBA commissioner David Stern. Yet it, too, must increase revenue, or it could suffer a similar fate.

BEYOND THE FIELD OF PLAY

Countering these challenges, though, are other successes – just beyond the field of play itself. Sportswriters and sports broadcasters were once exclusively male. But no longer. Women now often handle the commentary and announcing for tennis

and golf telecasts in the United States, and they also provide extensive color commentary on the sidelines at football and basketball games. They are not just window dressing, but serious journalists.

For a while, in the 1970s and 1980s, women battled against great odds to be allowed into professional teams' locker rooms along with their male counterparts for post-game interviews. Double standards continued to exist. As Chris Beman, a broadcaster for the ESPN cable network, observed in the mid-1990s, he could mispronounce a name without any repercussions, but women who did the same would be in deep trouble. "Rightly or wrongly," he said, "some viewers might look at a woman sportscaster as guilty until proven innocent, and the males are innocent until proven guilty."

But gradually, the criticisms and double standards have eroded. When this reporter was physically forced out of the (professional baseball) San Diego Padres' locker room during the 1984 National League Championship Series, the response from varied – and very male-dominated – bastions was immensely medicinal, not to mention helpful. The Baseball Writers Association of America strenuously protested the Padres' policies to the office of the baseball commissioner – not because a woman had been evicted from the workplace, but because a baseball writer had.

Within a month of taking over as baseball commissioner, Peter Ueberroth opened professional baseball's doors to all officially credentialed reporters, regardless of gender, just as they previously had been opened in the NBA and National Hockey League. Eventually, the National Football League followed suit, putting an end to a struggle that had started long before in the courts and in the dank hallways of stadiums and arenas across the land.

As momentous a decision as Ueberroth's was, I'll always remember most the action taken by the Padres' first baseman, Steve Garvey, who followed me out of the locker room the day I was ejected to assure that I would have at least one interview for my report on the game. "I will stay as long as you need," Garvey said in an attempt to calm the situation. "But

you have to get yourself together. You have a job to do." Two days later, Garvey elaborated: "You had a job to do, and every right to do it."

Garvey had summed up not only the struggle, but also the continuing reason to wage it. ■

Claire Smith is assistant sports editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

VICTORIES BY AND FOR THE DISABLED



BY SUSAN GREENWALD

New laws and changing public attitudes have created opportunities previously unavailable for persons with disabilities to participate in recreational and competitive sports.

Some disabled athletes even compete among the able-bodied at the interscholastic, international, and professional levels.

Disabled Americans, like Winter Paralympics athlete Allison Jones, above, compete in numerous sports.

Each winter, in the snow-packed mountains around Northern California's Lake Tahoe, skiers and chair lifts whiz by a small wood-covered building at the base of one of the mountains. Skis are propped up against the building's exterior walls, next to empty wheelchairs that seem to be out of place until one realizes that this building houses the first ski school fully accessible to persons with mental and physical disabilities. The Tahoe Adaptive Ski School, designed and constructed by Disabled Sports USA, Far West chapter (www.dsusafw.org), is a model for the opportunities it allows disabled skiers of all ages and abilities.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are 49.7 million Americans over the age of four with a disability. That represents 19 percent of the population, or one in five citizens. Among that 19 percent, 14.3 million Americans have a mental disability and 2.2 million say they use a wheelchair. For those wheelchair users and others with physical and mental disabilities, the Tahoe Adaptive Ski School offers a downhill or cross-country ski experience.

But sports opportunities for the disabled extend far beyond skiing. Depending on community offerings and the ability of each athlete, sports as diverse as hockey, horseback riding, rock climbing, scuba diving, cycling, water skiing, rugby, soccer, basketball, and many, many other sports are available to disabled athletes.

OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATION

Three pieces of federal legislation have opened doors in all aspects of life for people with disabilities in the United States. The Rehabilitation Act, adopted in 1973, was the first major initiative in this regard. The main purpose of the Act was to prevent discrimination in employment, transportation, and education programs that received federal funding. Sports programs were not the focus of the Act, but the law says that colleges and universities that receive federal funding for their physical education programs, including intramural and interscholastic sports, must make them accessible to disabled persons.

Pitcher Jim Abbott, who played baseball at the University of Michigan and moved on to the

professional major leagues for 10 years, is just one example of someone who may have benefited from the Rehabilitation Act. Born without a right hand, Jim pitched with his left hand and wore a glove over the small stump where his right hand should have been. For several years, until his retirement in 1999, Abbott made more than \$2 million a year. It is quite an accomplishment for a baseball player to go directly from college baseball to the major leagues, but Jim made the transition look easy – just as he made the quick switch of his glove from right-hand stump to left hand immediately after throwing a pitch look easy. This he did to be ready to catch a ball.

The most recent pieces of federal legislation aimed at ending discrimination against persons with disabilities were enacted in 1990. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) governs the education of students with disabilities in the public schools. IDEA states that physical education is a required educational service; thus the law facilitates participation of students with disabilities in public school and interscholastic sports programs. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a comprehensive law that bans discrimination against persons with disabilities, specifically in “places of exercise.” The ADA goes further than the previous laws and says that school, university, and community sports programs all must comply with ADA provisions.

In a landmark 2001 case, professional disabled golfer Casey Martin took his case against the PGA Tour all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The Court ruled that under provisions of the ADA, PGA Tour, Inc., must permit Martin use of a golf cart during tournaments. Martin went on to win a professional golf event in spite of a congenitally deformed and atrophied leg, the result of a degenerative circulatory disorder.

Disability-rights advocates say the ADA requires reasonable access to sporting facilities and events for the disabled. “People with disabilities demand choices in their lives based on the ADA and the heightening of social acceptance,” said John Kemp, an attorney and disabilities advocate who was born with no arms and no legs. “Sports is a valued choice and disabled athletes expect to be included as much as possible.”

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Seeing disabled athletes competing alongside able-bodied athletes in the same events changes the public's perception of persons with disabilities. However, despite better awareness of disabilities and the three federal laws enacted to end discrimination, not all event sponsors welcome disabled athletes with open arms. According to news accounts, the New York City Road Runners Club, hosts of the New York City Marathon (NYCM), have never made it easy for people with disabilities to participate in the race. Advocates for the disabled say the welcome mat seems to get smaller each year. After years of controversy and struggles, wheelchair racers won a court decision against NYCM that required organizers to provide an early start for wheelchair racers.

While the Rehabilitation Act, IDEA, and ADA have made sports more accessible to disabled athletes, the International Paralympic Games (www.paralympic.org) offer a venue in which to showcase the talents and abilities of the world's most elite athletes with physical disabilities. The multi-sport Paralympic Games are the second largest sporting event in the world, second only to the Olympics. .

The first Paralympics were held in 1960 in Rome, Italy. In 1988, Seoul, South Korea, began the modern-day practice of the Olympic Games-host nation also hosting the Paralympic Games. Today more than 4,000 athletes from 120 countries participate in the Summer Paralympics, while more than 1,100 athletes from 36 countries compete in the Winter Paralympic Games. Disability groups represented include amputees; blind or visually impaired athletes; athletes with cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, or other conditions that confine them to

wheelchairs; and athletes who are affected by a range of other disabilities that do not fall into a specific category, such as multiple sclerosis or dwarfism.

The Paralympics receive much more television and general press coverage throughout Europe than they do in the United States. Paralympic athletes generally are well known in Europe. "Many people with disabilities in the U.S. do not enjoy the level of acceptance that disabled athletes in Europe do," said John Kemp, president and CEO of HalfthePlanet Foundation (www.halftheplanet.org). But the U.S. Paralympic Committee (www.usparalympics.org) aims to change that. U.S. Paralympics is a division of

FROM NOVELIST JOHN IRVING THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP, 1976

"In that first wrestling season at Sterling, Garp worked hard and happily at learning his moves and his holds. Though he was soundly trounced by the varsity boys in his weight class, he never complained. He knew he had found his sport and his pastime. It would take the best of his energy until the writing came along. He loved the singleness of the combat and the frightening confines of that circle inscribed on the mat; the terrific conditioning; the mental constancy of keeping his weight down."

the U.S. Olympic Committee and was created in May 2001 to focus efforts on enhancing opportunities for persons with physical disabilities to participate in Paralympic sports. The United States hosted the most recent Winter Paralympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 2002. Marla Runyon, a five-time

Paralympic gold medallist, became the first legally blind runner to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team. Diagnosed with Stargardt's Disease as a child, Marla has been legally blind for more than 20 years. Marla ran the 1500-meter race at the Sydney Summer Olympics in 2000 to finish eighth, while becoming the first Paralympian to compete in the Olympics. She now has long distance aspirations. In the 2002 New York City Marathon, Marla finished fifth among the fastest runners in the world with a time of 2:27:10. In 2003, she finished a personally disappointing 20th.

DOING WHAT IT TAKES

Also finishing the 2003 NYC marathon, just a day later than the other competitors, was 55-year-old Zoe Koplowitz, with a time of 29 hours and 45 minutes. Time is not an issue for Koplowitz, who was diagnosed with diabetes and multiple sclerosis 30 years ago. She uses two purple crutches to get through the course and stops often to rest and check her blood levels. "I think that's really the ultimate

lesson, you just keep going until you get it done," she told reporters at the finish line after completing her 16th appearance in this event. "You do what it takes."

There are many stories of courageous, determined, disabled athletes who won't let anything get in the way of their athletic pursuits. Mark Wellman, who was paralyzed in a rock climbing accident, developed a pulley rope system to enable him to climb as a paraplegic. This amazing rock climber (www.nolimitstahoe.com) ascended a 120-foot rope with the Paralympic torch, to light the Cauldron at the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia.

Creative adaptation is not just for paralyzed

athletes. A device that emits guiding lights and tones enables the blind and visually impaired to compete in bowling. Constructed as a senior design project during the 2002-2003 school year for physical education classes at the Indiana School for the Blind, the device is positioned above the bowling lane and features a set

of nine white lights and sound sensors that serve as targets.

Special Olympics (www.specialolympics.org) is perhaps the best-known organization for athletes with developmental disabilities. Special Olympics offers children and adults with mental retardation the opportunity to train and compete in 26 Olympic-type summer and winter sports. In Somers, New York, E.J. Greczylo, a 15-year-old eighth grader with Down's syndrome, played in his first high school football game this past October.

E.J.'s parents credit Special Olympics with giving him the confidence to play and compete in many sports.

This past fall produced some wonderful football moments. In September, Neil Parry, a football player for San Jose State University, was playing with his team for the first time in two seasons. Neil suffered a compound fracture on October 14, 2000, in a game against the University of Texas-El Paso that resulted in his right leg being amputated 18 inches below the knee. Eighteen months and 20 surgeries later, Neil returned to the field with the aid of a prosthetic device, inspiring all who know him with his

determination. "If you can't be motivated [by Neil], you can't be motivated," head coach Fitz Hill said. "You don't have a pulse."

Not all athletes strive to compete at the intercollegiate level like Neil Parry or for Olympic greatness like Marla Runyon. The majority



Wheelchair events and the Paralympics are a staple of the American sports scene these days.

compete for exercise, for enjoyment, or to achieve personal goals. But an extra measure of creativity and innovation is usually required to enable disabled athletes to play and compete. Happily, today we have hundreds, maybe thousands, of examples of individuals who, in one way or another, have contributed to making participation in sports possible for persons with disabilities. ■

Freelance writer Susan Greenwald, who uses a wheelchair, began writing about disabled athletes after working at the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta, Georgia.

PRIDE ON THE PRAIRIE

By CHUCK OFFENBURGER



High school games in rural Iowa.

Girls' basketball is arguably more popular and pervasive in Iowa than anywhere else in the United States. The writer explores the roots of an 85-year-old sports phenomenon, the oldest program of its kind, and what it has meant to the identity and culture of this Midwestern farm state.

In the state of Iowa in America's heartland, girls' high school basketball is big – real big. It's big enough that when the girls' team in a town like little Rock Valley (pop. 2,838) in extreme northwest Iowa qualifies for the state tournament, schools and businesses there close. Buses are chartered and a full half of the town's population will be sitting in Veterans Memorial Auditorium in Des Moines, the capital city, when their girls run out on the big floor.

The drive from Rock Valley to Des Moines is 4 _ hours one way. If the girls keep winning and play in the championship game, their fans will make three trips to the capital city in a week. The school team has won three consecutive state championships among the small schools -- competition is divided into four classes, based on school enrollment so Rock Valley fans have done a whole lot of traveling.

"I can't believe all the money that gets spent when we're in the state tournament," said Rock Valley coach Preston Kooima. "I sometimes think we should try to impose some kind of special 'Sioux County Tax' on the money our fans are spending in Des Moines instead of back here."

Everybody wants to "go to state," as they say.

Washington, a town of 7,047 located in southeast Iowa, won three consecutive championships in Class 3A from 1999-2001. The team was led by Stephanie

Rich, who has now gone on to play for the University of Wisconsin.

As she was going through high school in Washington, Rich worked as a receptionist at a local retirement home in connection with the school's job-training program. She got to know everyone in the home. In her senior year, as she was warming up before a state tournament game in Des Moines, she was shocked to see among the Washington fans a mini-bus load of the home's residents wearing special T-shirts, with its "Halcyon House" name on the front and, on the back, "We Back Steph!"

The following for the teams from Iowa's largest schools is big, too. Fans in Ankeny, a suburb of 27,117 residents just north of Des Moines, have seen their high school team win four Class 4A state championships in the past seven years. Ankeny set an all-time record for most advance ticket sales by a school for a single state tournament game -- 1,946 in 2002; the figure does not include a few hundred more tickets that Ankeny fans probably bought at the arena door.

OH, WHAT A SHOW!

About 80,000 people are in the stands for the championship week of play, which begins with games at mid-morning Monday and concludes late on Saturday night. There will be 10,000 fans there both Friday night and Saturday night to view the championship games in each of the four classes. In most years, the girls' state tournament draws more fans than the boys' tournament, played a week later.

The girls' tournament is an Iowa festival, "a gathering of the clan," former Des Moines Register

columnist Donald Kaul once wrote. Both of Iowa's U.S. Senators, Republican Charles Grassley and Democrat Tom Harkin, will almost certainly attend, as will a U.S. Congressman or two from Iowa, the state's governor, and other top state government officials.

A television network carries the championship games statewide and into six surrounding states. More than 100 radio stations will cover at least one game during state tournament week; sometimes as many as five of the stations are broadcasting the same game. Some of the stations now stream their broadcasts on the Internet, so alumni scattered around the world can listen to their alma mater's big game at the state tournament.

Incredible pageantry accompanies the girls' state tournament. There are high school stage bands for every game, choirs that sing the National Anthem, girl and boy drill teams for halftime performances, a flag-waving "Patriotism Pageant" on Saturday nights. A group of Des Moines-area high school boys in tuxedos line up with brooms in hand and, with the arena lights doused and spotlights on them, they sweep the court during the championship games while the band plays "Satin Doll," an old kick-line favorite. The girls in the crowd scream in delight.

Most of that fun was the idea of E. Wayne Cooley, now 81, who retired in 2002 after nearly 50 years at the helm of the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union, which sanctions girls' sports in the state.

Cooley and his production chief Bob Scarpino, a former television producer, had "learned that it was just as important, maybe more important, to sell the 'sizzle' as it was to sell the steak," as Scarpino put it. If a game turned out to be not such a good one, well, the entertainment would still make fans glad they had bought tickets.

At the 2003 state tournament, involving some 480 basketball players from 32 teams, the "sizzle" included 2,178 singers, dancers, and other performers as well as fireworks. An addition this year will be a 15-foot-by-19-foot "color-replay board" carrying live photos of fans and of the game action from three cameras scattered around the arena.

A WONDERFUL KIND OF GLUE

But what may be most unusual about girls' basketball in Iowa is that the state tournaments have been played for 85 years, beginning in 1920. And two decades before that, there were some teams pioneering the game in Dubuque, Ottumwa, Muscatine, Davenport, and other eastern Iowa cities.

In 2002, when I wrote a history of girls' high school sports in Iowa, I noted that basketball has served as "a wonderful kind of glue that bonds generations of women in the state – great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters who've all

played, won, lost, and learned from it." In no other state have games and tournaments for girls been organized on a statewide basis for four, now beginning five, generations.

Why did girls' basketball bloom so early and so fully in Iowa?

Most who have dug into the early history of the game conclude that the immigrants who came from Europe to settle Iowa really valued

physical fitness. The girls knew hard work on the farms and in jobs related to the early coal mining in Iowa. And it was relatively inexpensive to nail the ring of a bushel basket on a tree or barn and start-up a basketball game. Such games became one of the leading forms of local entertainment in remote little communities where there wasn't much else.

A girls' basketball superstar in Iowa is sometimes better-known than the best football players at the University of Iowa and Iowa State University. Two superstars who scored more than 60 points per game on average, Lynne Lorenzen of Ventura in the late 1980s and Denise Long of Whitten in the late 1960s, had parks named after them in their tiny hometowns.

"In Iowa, suiting up in the colors of your hometown confers glory that lasts a lifetime," wrote Sports Illustrated correspondent Kevin Cook in a 1989 story on the state basketball tournament. "In Iowa, middle-aged husbands sit around the fireplace reminiscing about their wives' high school hoops exploits."

Years ago, all schools played in one class, and only 16 qualified for the "Sweet Sixteen," the state finals. Now, with the tournament divided into the four classes, more girls get to have the state tournament experience.

**FROM FORMER U.S. SENATOR AND PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL PLAYER BILL BRADLEY
VALUES OF THE GAME, 1998**

"Part of the beauty and mystery of basketball rests in the variety of its team requirements. Championships are not won unless a team has forged a high degree of unity, attainable only through the selflessness of each of its players. It is in the moves the uninitiated often don't see that the sport has its deepest currents: the perfect screen, the purposeful movement away from the ball, the well-executed boxout, the deflected pass. Statistics don't always measure teamwork; holding the person you're guarding scoreless doesn't show up in your stats."

But the biggest change of all began in the middle 1980s, when the “five-girl game” started up in Iowa. It is the game most of the world knows today, with full-court play and rules very similar to those in boys’ basketball.

NO MORE SIX-GIRL TEAMS

The game on which Iowa had built its reputation and its huge fan following in girls’ basketball was the “six-girl game.” Three girls were “guards” who played defense only, and they stayed on one half of the court. Their three teammates were the “forwards,” who did all the shooting and scoring at the other end of the court. The passing was crisp, the pace could be frenetic, and the scoring could be wild. In what is generally regarded as the greatest girls’ game ever played in Iowa, the team from Long beat the team from Everly 113-107 in overtime in the 1968 state championship.

But the clock was ticking for the dear old six-girl game. It had grown up in the small schools and small towns in Iowa, where it fit well. Meanwhile, the larger schools in Iowa had abandoned girls’ basketball in the 1920s, when there was some contention that it was “inappropriate” for girls to compete in sports in front of live audiences that included males.

Those large schools started adding girls’ sports, including basketball, after the 1973 U.S. government’s Title IX law, which mandated equal

opportunity for athletes of both sexes. Most opted for the five-girl game. In 1985, the state tournament was played in two divisions – one for the five-girl teams and one for the traditional six-girl teams. But more schools, even the small ones, began opting for the five-girl game, and so the last six-girl championship was played in 1993.

Troy Dannen, 37, who succeeded E. Wayne Cooley as administrator of the Girls Union, said regardless of the subtle differences between the six-player and five-player game, the important factor to remember is that the girls have always been “playing for their schools, their communities, and for pride.” The success of any high school sports team in state-

level competition “is still the window into those communities for a whole state,” Dannen added. “When you say ‘Rock Valley’ to somebody in Iowa right now, people feel like they know the town from girls’ basketball.”

Indeed, said Sonia Remmerde, 47, “I think the championships put Rock Valley on the map, which is fun.” Sonia and her husband Lyle, 46, are the parents of Deb Remmerde, who led the Rock Valley to a record of 107 victories and only four losses in her four years of play. She is now a freshman playing at the University of Iowa. Deb’s younger sister, Karin, is a high school junior who is expected to be in the Rock Valley starting line-up again this year.

When the Remmerdes’ son Paul, now 21, started playing high school ball, and with Deb, Karin, and little Annie, who is now 13, all coming along, they decided to build a first-rate basketball court in the west half of the farm machine shop that they operate. The steel building sits smack in the middle of a sprawling farm operation that includes about 3,000 cattle, 2,000 hogs, and 500 acres of corn and soybeans.

The 50-foot-by-50-foot court features two baskets with fiberglass backboards, a real scoreboard on one wall, fluorescent lighting, and an infrared heating system. It’s a rare evening now when some Rock Valley kids – girls and boys – aren’t shooting or playing pick-up games in “The Shop,” as everybody calls it, at Remmerdes’ farm.

City administrator Tom Van Maanen, 35, says basketball

“brings everybody together in a small community like this. It adds a lot of excitement and a ton of community pride. And it’s probably even a little more special for us because for a lot of years, our girls really weren’t very good.”

Coach Preston Kooima, 34, in his eighth year directing Rock Valley, said the team’s success seems to have a positive impact on nearly everything at school.

“Maybe it shouldn’t be this way, but it is – when you’re winning, the success seems to run all through these hallways,” he said. “There’s more excitement for everything. There’s more pride. Everybody seems to work harder.”



The name of the game in Iowa is high school girls' basketball.

FRIENDS AND LESSONS FOR LIFE

Gert Jonker, 69, a cousin to Coach Kooima, said, "I played basketball for Rock Valley from 1948 to 1951, and in my senior year, we got beat in overtime or we would've made it to the state tournament."

"I've told Preston that those girls he's coaching today will be good friends the rest of their lives. To this day, those girls I played with are still good friends of mine."

Jonker says basketball "definitely builds confidence in the girls, and a lot of them need that. It teaches them how to get along with a group of people and how to have fun in a group. And it teaches you how to set high standards for yourself, and about sportsmanship. Those are all things that will help you no matter what you go on to do." ■

Chuck Offenburger is a former Des Moines Register columnist now living in Storm Lake, Iowa, and writing for the Internet site www.Offenburger.com. In 2002, he wrote E. Wayne Cooley and the Iowa Girl: A Celebration of the Nation's Best High School Girls Sports Program, a book that chronicles the history of a girls' sports program in Iowa and the life of the executive who ran the program for 48 years. It is available from the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union at www.ighsau.org

REFLECTIONS: URBAN "HOOP"

BY JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

An Excerpt from **Hoop Roots: Basketball, Race and Love**

The sky's the limit in inner-city basketball in the United States.



Before John Edgar Wideman became renowned for writing fiction and nonfiction, and for winning two PEN/Faulkner Awards, he was a star basketball player at the University of Pennsylvania. Today, he is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In a recent book, Hoop Roots, Wideman focuses his artistic sensibilities on his inner city background. He compares and contrasts

two fundamental passions in his life – writing and playing basketball. When he refers in the excerpt below to the beauty of playing “hoop,” he is using a term common on urban playgrounds across America for the game of basketball. Wideman mirrors a long line of American authors who have explored the lessons and meanings of life from the perspective of the playing field or court.

Growing up, I needed basketball because my family was poor and colored, hemmed in by material circumstances none of us knew how to control, and if I wanted more, a larger, different portion than other poor colored folks in Homewood [an inner city neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania], I had to single myself out....

As a kid, did I think about my life in terms of wanting more. More of what. Where would I find it. Did I actually pose similar questions to myself. When. How. Why. Looking back, I'm pretty sure about love, an awakening hunger for the game, and not too sure of much else. The act of looking back, the action of writing down what I think I see/saw, destroys certainty. The past presents itself fluidly, changeably, at least as much a work in progress as the present or future.

No scorebook. No reliable witnesses or too many witnesses. Too much time. No time. One beauty of playground hoop is how relentlessly, scrupulously it encloses and defines moments. Playing the game well requires all your attention. When you're working to stay in the game, the game works to keep you there. None of the mind's subtle, complex operations are shut down when you play, they're just intently harnessed, focused to serve the game's complex demands. In the heat of the game you may conceive of yourself playing the game, an aspect of yourself watching another aspect perform, but the speed of the game, its continuous go and flow, doesn't allow a player to indulge this conscious splitting-off and self-reflection, common, perhaps necessary, to writing autobiography. Whatever advantages such self-division confers are swiftly overridden when you're playing hoop by the compelling necessity to be, to be acutely alert to what you're experiencing as play, the consuming reality of the game's immediate demands. You are the experience. Or it thumps you in the face like a teammate's pass you weren't expecting when you should have been expecting.

Writing autobiography, looking back, trying to recall and represent yourself at some point in the

past, you are playing many games simultaneously. There are many selves, many sets of rules jostling for position. None offers the clarifying, cleansing unity of playing hoop. The ball court provides a frame, boundaries, the fun and challenge of call and response that forces you to concentrate your boundless energy within a defined yet seemingly unlimited space. The past is not forgotten when you walk onto the court to play. It lives in the Great Time of the game's flow, incorporating past present and future, time passing as you work to bring to bear all you've ever learned about the game, your educated instincts, conditioned responses,

experience accumulated from however many years you've played and watched the game played, a past that's irrelevant baggage unless you can access it

instantaneously. Second thoughts useless.

Opportunities knock once. And if you think about missing the previous shot when you're attempting the next one, most likely you'll miss it, too. And on and on, you lose, until, unless you get your head back into the game. Into what's next and next and next. The past is crucial, though not in the usual sense. Means everything or nothing depending on how it's employed and how you should employ it strictly, ruthlessly dictated by the flow, the moment. Yes. You can sit back and ponder your performance later, learn from your mistakes, maybe, or spin good stories and shapeshift mistakes into spectacular plays, but none of that's playing ball.

If playground hoop is about the once and only go and flow of time, its unbroken continuity, about time's thick, immersing, perpetual presence, writing foregrounds the alienating disconnect among competing selves, competing, often antagonistic voices within the writer, voices with separate agendas, voices occupying discrete, unbridgeable islands of time and space. Writing, whether it settles into a traditional formulaic set of conventions to govern the relationship between writer and reader or experiments within those borders, relies on some mode of narrative sequencing or "story line" to function as the game's spine of action functions to keep everybody's attention through a linear duration

**FROM NOVELIST RICHARD FORD
THE SPORTSWRITER, 1986**

"Athletes, by and large, are people who are happy to let their actions speak for them, happy to be what they do."

of time. The problem for writers is that story must be invented anew for each narrative. A story interesting to one person may bore another. Writing describes ball games the reader can never be sure anybody has ever played. The only access to them is through the writer's creation. You can't go there or know there, just accept someone's words they exist... .

Here's the paradox: hoop frees you to play by putting you into a real cage. Writing cages the writer with the illusion of freedom. Playing ball, you submit for a time to certain narrow arbitrary rules, certain circumscribed choices. But once in, there's no script, no narrative line you must follow. Writing lets you imagine you're outside time, freely generating rules and choices, but as you tell your story you're bound tighter and tighter; word by word, following the script you narrate. No logical reason a playground game can't go on forever. In a sense that's exactly what Great Time, the vast, all-encompassing ocean of nonlinear time, allows the game to do. A piece of writing without the unfolding drama or closure promised or implicit can feel shapeless, like it might go on forever, and probably loses its audience at that point.

Fortunately, graciously, the unpredictability of language, its stubborn self-referentiality, its mysterious capacity to mutate, assert a will of its own no matter how hard you struggle to enslave it, bend it, coerce it to express your bidding, language, with its shadowy, imminent resources and magical emergent properties, sometimes approximates a hoop games freedom. The writer feels what it's like to be a player when the medium rules, when its constraints are also a free ride to unforeseen, unexpected, surprising destinations, to breaks and zones offering the chance to do something, be somebody, somewhere, somehow new... .

Given all the above, I still want more from writing... Not because I expect more from writing, I just need more. Want to share the immediate excitement of process, of invention, of play. (Maybe that's why I teach writing.) Need more in the same way I needed more as I was growing up in Homewood. Let me be clear. The more I'm talking about then and now is not simply an extra slice of pie or cake. Seeking more means self-discovery. Means redefining the art I practice. In the present instance, wanting to

compose and share a piece of writing that won't fail because it might not fit someone else's notion of what a book should be... .

We're plagued, even when we have every reason to know better, by deep-seated anxieties – are we doomed because we are not these “white” other people, are we fated, because we are who we are, never to be good enough. I need writing because it can extend the measure of what's possible, allow me to engage in defining standards. In my chosen field I can strive to accomplish what [former U.S. professional basketball star] Michael Jordan has achieved in playing hoop – become a standard for others to measure themselves against.

So playground basketball and writing, alike and unlike, both start there – ways to single myself out. Seeking qualities in myself worth saving, something others might appreciate and reward, qualities, above all, I can count on to prove a point to myself, to change myself for better or worse. Hoop and writing intrigue me because no matter how many answers I articulate, how gaudy my stat [statistics] sheet appears, hoop and writing keep asking the same questions. Is anybody home in there. Who. If I take a chance and turn the sucker out, will he be worth ... the trouble. Or shame me. Embarrass me. Or represent. Shine forth. ■



John Edgar Wideman is the author of Sent For You Yesterday and Philadelphia Fire, among other novels, and several volumes of nonfiction, including a memoir, Brothers and Keepers, and Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons, Race and Society.

HUNGER ON HOLD

By TONY BARANEK

Coaches and teammates in two suburban communities near Chicago take measures to ensure that Muslim athletes are able to observe Ramadan.

Over the past two seasons, the football team at Stagg High School, in Palos Hills, Illinois, has received many an ovation from its appreciative fans. That results naturally from qualifying for the state championships twice in a row and coming tantalizingly close to making it to the final rounds.

But third-year coach Tim McAlpin says he was genuinely moved by one particular cheer. This one, though, came from the players. It occurred near the end of the regular season in 2002, when the coaching staff gathered the team together to explain why things were going to be just a little bit different at practice and before ballgames that November.

Members of the Chargers who were Muslims were beginning their annual month-long fast of Ramadan, a holiday during which those who practice Islam celebrate the good fortune in their lives by fasting during daylight hours. It's a particularly challenging time for Muslims who are high (secondary) school athletes, a group becoming significantly larger in the United States.

The most critical games and matches of the fall sports season take place during November in football, girls volleyball, girls swimming, and cross-country. Yet for the Muslim athletes, there is no lunchtime or after-school snack. Showing up for practice means doing so without having had nourishment of any kind for nearly 10 hours.

McAlpin told his team's players that they would need to sacrifice a few minutes of practice time at sunset to allow their Muslim teammates to sustain

themselves.

"One of the assistant coaches pointed out how awesome it was that [the Muslim players] were doing this," McAlpin said. "He said that that was their religion and we will respect them for believing in that and doing what they needed to do."

A FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

How did the other athletes react to this? "The whole team gave them a standing ovation," McAlpin said. "But that's kind of like the family atmosphere we have here at Stagg. We have a whole lot of different cultures here, all being



Muslim high school athletes break their fast in the team's locker room.

together and working together."

In the 2002 state playoffs, Stagg advanced to the semifinal round. Throughout the playoff campaign, not once did starting defensive lineman Ahmad Abdel-Jalil eat or drink during daylight hours. "But he just kept going and going," McAlpin marveled. "He hung in there and played well."

Mahmood Ghouleh, a senior at Reavis High School in nearby Burbank, Illinois, is a wide receiver and strong safety on that school's football team. He says that celebrating Ramadan simply is all part of being Muslim.

"It's tough, but you get used to it," said Ghouleh. "It's how we show that we're thankful for what we have, instead of taking everything for granted."

In 2003, Ramadan began on October 27 and continued until the last week of November. As always, it was intended to be a period of reflection as Muslims commemorate the time when the Koran, the Muslim holy book, was revealed to the Prophet

Muhammad in the seventh century. During Ramadan, devout Muslims pray and abstain from food and drink between sunrise and sunset.

Ghouleh says the 10 Muslim members on Reavis's football team were remaining firm to their convictions and would continue their fast no matter how far the Rams advanced in the state playoffs. This conviction doesn't surprise Kareem Irfan, chairman of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicagoland.

ONE OF THE FIVE PILLARS

"This is a very fundamental obligation for a Muslim," Irfan said. "Fasting is one of the five pillars, and you really cannot call yourself a Muslim if you're not fasting. The youths know that. They realize that in order to do justice to the name they carry as a Muslim, they have to do this with conviction.

"For athletes, it helps to have good role models, too," Irfan continued. "In the past we've had professional athletes like [basketball player] Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Akeem Olajuwon [another basketball star] was an outstanding role model. He played his [league] games without giving up on the fasting.

"Role models like these are an inspiration. I know my daughter [a high school basketball player] is inspired...to see somebody like [that], at that high level of professionalism, still adhere to the fundamentals of Islam, to fast, and be able to keep up that level."

Ghouleh is a 6-foot-1-inch, 161-pound senior strong safety and wide receiver who sees plenty of playing time each week in the Reavis High games. "Mo is doing very well [physically]," his coach, JimMcDonough, said. "Actually, all of our [Muslim] kids seem to be doing pretty well. They're pretty tough kids. Plus, at this point [when the weather cools], practices aren't as physically demanding as they are earlier in the year."

Yet there can be still be complications from fasting for such an extended period of time, for athletes as well as non-athletes. The most serious is a natural

shrinking of the stomach. "You don't really get that hungry after a while," Ghouleh said. "You'll feel like you're real hungry, but once you start eating you get full right away. Even after we're done fasting, it takes about a month to get over it."

A SUPPORT NETWORK

Nonetheless, says Irfan, the average Muslim teenager is well equipped to handle the rigors of fasting. At around the age of eight, Muslim children begin fasting in small increments, gradually building up their resistance before taking part fully in Ramadan when they reach puberty.

"And when they are active in sports," Irfan explained, "there is a support network that is built around a fasting Muslim. At home, parents pay particular attention to make sure that their children are getting proper nutrition. And then

during the activities, the athletes know how to pace themselves."

Ghouleh tries to minimize the effect of dawn-to-dusk fasting by having a good breakfast. "I tell my mom to wake me up before sunrise," he said. "She wakes me up at around four in the morning. I'll eat a bowl of cereal or pancakes and then just go back to bed until it's time to get up for school."

Soad Halim, a senior at Stagg and a member of the girls' volleyball team, also subscribes to the very-early-to-rise meal along with her younger sister, Sanabel. "We do that, too," she said. "It's just a regular breakfast my mom makes. We just eat and go back to sleep. That helps us throughout the day."

Football coaches like McAlpin at Stagg and McDonough at Reavis do their part to respect the Muslim players' beliefs by making adjustments in their practice and pre-game routines.

"They have to say prayers at certain times," McAlpin said. "What we'd do was come out for practice and they'd go off to the side and do their prayers for about six minutes. We'd wait until they were done and then start our practice. Then, when the sun would go down, I'd tell them, 'Whenever you have to stop and eat or pray, you stop. Go off, and

FROM NOVELIST F. SCOTT FITZGERALD THE GREAT GATSBY, 1925

"Her husband, among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven - a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anticlimax."

eat your lunch or pray. It's not a big deal. We'll move on, and when you get back, you'll go back where you were.' And they were real good about doing it on their own."

Ghouleh brings a small amount of food — an apple or a sandwich — with him to practice. The players begin their workouts at 3:15 p.m., and practice until shortly after sunset, when McDonough blows his whistle and takes the players off the field for about 15 minutes.

"We give the whole team a break. There aren't any problems at all," the coach noted. "I think it's an excellent experience for all the kids to see some of the other things that go on in life."

Stagg girls' volleyball coach Colleen Hyland also calls a timeout at her team practices so that the Halim sisters can grab some food around five in the afternoon.

"Sometimes my teammates bring me things, give me pretzels or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches," Soad Halim said. "They're very supportive. Most of them have been friends of mine since kindergarten, so they know everything about Ramadan. There was this one girl, though, a non-Muslim, who tried it and said it was pretty hard. She lasted two days!"

SUMMONED FOR A FEAST

In mid-fall 2003, Reavis's football squad competed in its first state playoff contest since 1995.

If the game had begun in the early afternoon, Gouleh and his Muslim teammates would have had to play without having eaten for more than seven hours. As it was, they had been without food or drink for nearly 11 hours when they began warming up at four-thirty p.m. Shortly after the sun set about a half-hour later, coach McDonough stopped the drill, and the school athletic director, Tim Smith, summoned the Muslim players for a feast.

"All the [Muslim] players went inside and ate. Then, after a few minutes to digest, we went back out and continued [our] pre-game [warm-ups]. I didn't really overeat. We knew we had a game to play. I ate half of a sub [sandwich], and saved the other half for after the game."

Surely, he savored the second half of the sandwich — but not nearly as much as he savored the victory that moved his team to the next rung of the championships. ■

Tony Baranek covers high school sports for the Daily Southtown, a suburban newspaper based in Tinley Park, Illinois, near Chicago.

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SPORTS AND ECONOMICS

A CONVERSATION WITH
ANDREW ZIMBALIST

Andrew Zimbalist, professor of economics at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, is an analyst of economic trends and issues in American sports. He is the author of several books on sports economics, including, most recently, *May the Best Man Win: Baseball Economics and Public Policy* (coauthored with Bob Costas). In this dialogue with State Department writer Michael J. Bandler, Zimbalist discusses the economic dynamics of sports in America – mostly at the professional level, but at the university and community levels as well – placing sports in the context of the economy at large.

Q: Given the importance of free enterprise in American society, how significant a portion of the U.S. economy does the sports sector represent?

A: If you're talking, first of all, about the big four [professional] sports leagues – basketball, football, baseball, and hockey – together they're probably somewhere on the order of \$10 to \$15 billion in revenue, in an economy that's almost \$11 trillion in size. If you begin to add some of the other events outside the orbit of those four – golf, NASCAR [auto racing], college sports – then you're doubling the figure to somewhere in the neighborhood of \$30 billion. So by one reckoning or another, it's a very small part of the economic output of the United States.

Q: Talk for a moment about the impact of sports on regional and local economies. How have sports altered the social development of communities?

A: The independent economic research that's been done on the question of whether sports teams and sports facilities have an economic impact on an area has uniformly found that there is no positive impact. By having a sports team or a new stadium or arena,

you don't increase the level of per capita income, and you don't increase the level of employment. There's no direct economic development benefit.

Q: And yet cities have been following the pattern, in recent years, of building new stadiums and arenas in the heart of the community, and demolishing the cookie-cutter facilities along outlying freeways. It would seem, to a layman, that there's an economic connection.

A: Well, it might strike a layman that way, but it's still not true. One can easily explain the interest in having professional sports teams as primarily social and cultural in nature. People in America and in other countries certainly enjoy and love sports. One of the wonderful things about having a sports team in your community is that it galvanizes everyone to actually experience themselves as a community. It gives them an identity. That kind of expression of enthusiasm and unity is an aspect of the community experience that you don't have often in modern society, which is so atomized and individualized because of things like the automobile and television. It provides a very special experience for people – or at least it can.

To say that it doesn't benefit an economy is different from saying it doesn't have any value. I'm certainly not arguing that. Sports, potentially, have a very important role to play, which is why people support them. Another reason is that there are economic interests, particular private interests, that do benefit from having a team or new stadium. I'm thinking, certainly, of construction companies, general contractors, architectural firms, investment bankers who float the bonds to finance new stadiums, lawyers who work for the investment bankers, maybe restaurant and hotel interests. And, of course, there's the team owner.

You know, cities build parks and opera houses –

not because they think it's going to generate higher per capita income, but because it's a form of social and cultural enrichment.

Q: Do the economics of sports differ from other key economic sectors in the way the market works?

A: Very much so. There's one fundamental difference – if you look at team sports. For a team sports league to be successful – and overseas sports fans will recognize this very readily – you need to have a certain amount of balance across the teams, a certain amount of uncertainty about who's going to

happy, I would suspect, if GM went out of business. The New York Yankees are not going to be perfectly happy if the Boston Red Sox or the New York Mets go out of business. These are teams that need each other to produce. If the Yankees were playing intra-squad games all day long, fans would lose interest in that as well. So this is a jointly produced product. Joint production in a normal economic industry would be viewed as collusion, and disallowed. So sports leagues do have this extra element.

Q: What about the impact of labor on the sports sector?



Baseball's return to the hearts of U.S. downtowns: Baltimore's Camden Yards.

win a particular game, who's going to win a particular championship. If you don't have uncertainty, then fans lose interest. This is different from any other industry in a capitalist economy. You don't need to have Toyota and General Motors and Ford and Chrysler being relatively equal to each other in order to buy a good automobile. You need some level of competition, but that doesn't mean you need four equally positioned car companies; it doesn't necessarily mean that you need four car companies. Chrysler Corporation would be perfectly

A: That's an interesting situation – labor markets and the frequent disruptions we've had either from lockouts or strikes in the United States. The problem is that labor unions say that they want to have free markets, and the best way to determine how much Barry Bonds [of the San Francisco Giants, 2003's most valuable player honoree] is worth, or the best way to determine how much [former professional basketball player] Michael Jordan used to be worth, is by letting the marketplace tell us. Let the different employers compete to hire these guys and see how

much the employers value them at – and that’s what somebody should be paid. That’s all well and good, except that if you’re in a league in which the different teams are supposed to have not actual equality among them in their competitive strength, but enough...

Q: ...to produce a drama or suspense for interest.

A: Precisely. Then you can’t have a situation in which one of the teams from New York City, which benefits from a media market of 7.4 million households, is competing against a baseball or basketball team from Milwaukee {Wisconsin}, with a media market of less than a million households, or a football team from Green Bay {Wisconsin}, with a media market of 100,000 households. If you say, ‘let the Milwaukee Brewers and the New York Yankees [major league baseball teams] go out into the same labor market to hire a player, and let them compete,’ just like GM and Ford would compete to hire an executive, the problem is that if the Yankees hire a star center fielder who hits 40 home runs a season and bats .320, in the New York marketplace that person might generate \$20 or \$30 million in value. In Milwaukee, that person might generate five or \$10 million in value.

So what will happen is that the large-market teams will get disproportionately many more of the good players, and there will be an imbalance across the teams. That produces the tension about the kind of labor market you should really have. The players’ unions want free labor markets, and the owners say those don’t work, that they will put a lot of teams out of business and actually hurt the league, because there’ll no longer be competitive balance.

So the owners start looking for mechanisms to restrain the costs and to make everybody experience similar costs and to provide some parity across the teams, in terms of competitive strength. There’s talk about salary caps [ceilings], luxury taxes, or revenue sharing. That’s a whole dilemma, a whole tension,

that exists in sports leagues but not in a similar way in other industries.

Q: In other countries, quite frequently, kids join after-school clubs to engage in organized athletics. In this country, schools on all educational levels have teams as an integral part of their makeup. And leagues are organized within the framework of the school or university system. Do economic considerations play a role in school athletics in the United States?

A: This is a complicated question. One aspect that is interesting to talk about is why do colleges get so involved in big-time sports. Many people assume that the reason for the involvement is that schools make a lot of money from these programs. The reality is that of the 970 or so

**FROM NOVELIST JOHN UPDIKE
NEW YORKER MAGAZINE ARTICLE, 1960**

“Fenway Park, in Boston, is a lyric little bandbox of a ball park. Everything is painted green...in curiously sharp focus, like the inside of an old-fashioned peeping-type Easter egg. It was built in 1912, and rebuilt in 1934, and offers, as do most Boston artifacts, a compromise between Man’s Euclidean determinacies and Nature’s beguiling irregularities.”

schools belonging to the National Collegiate Athletic Association {the umbrella group regulating university sports programs}, there might be a half-dozen – maybe 10 – schools that actually have a surplus in their athletic programs. All the rest have deficits, and usually they’re sizeable – several million dollars. The thing that drives college sports is different. First of all, you have the NCAA itself, which historically has been a trade association of athletic directors and coaches. They want college sports to grow. They want new stadiums. They want their teams to be more competitive. But you also have boosters in the local communities, local business people who contribute in various ways. It’s very important for the universities to maintain good “town-gown” relationships. Then there are the alumni, who are interested in following the universities through their teams; the students, who are involved with sports; and very often, trustees, or members of state legislatures, who want their schools’ sports teams to do well. So a whole culture of competition evolves around the sports effort. That’s different from saying this is a kind of calculated plan to generate revenue.

When you stop to think about the university athletic programs, these are not privately held

companies with stockholders who demand annual dividends and stock growth, capital gains. If you don't have a constituency out there demanding the economic return, well, if an athletic director is presiding over a successful team and feels he can pull in an extra four million dollars from his squad's championship participation, he'll immediately say, "this is a good time to build a new training facility, a new fitness center, a new tutoring facility, or to spend more money on recruitment."

Q: Has there been an economic incentive to the embryonic development of newer sports – beach volleyball, women's softball, the extreme sports, much of what we're seeing surface on American television now?

A: That has to do more with the telecommunications revolution and the emergence of digital cable – the technological capability of putting 50, 100, 200, 300 channels on TV. Each of these channels needs to have filler. These different activities generate very little revenue.

Q: We don't have a sports ministry in this country, no national endowment for sports as we have for the arts and humanities. What are the pros and cons of government subsidy of sports, and to what degree do we see it here?

A: Well, there is a lot of subsidy, and tax preferences. At the local level, there is financing for things like stadiums. At the national level, you have

tax exemptions for localities, municipalities when they float bonds to build stadiums. For college sports, you have various kinds of scholarship programs that go directly or indirectly to athletes. That, too, involves public money. But in terms of a controlling ministry, we don't have one, as it exists in other parts of the world. To my mind, it's not altogether an awful idea to think about creating one. It's not an awful idea to think about standards that are implemented not by the people eventually affected by them, but by disinterested observers. There's a lot of potential justification, I think, for some kind of public oversight, but the ideology in the United States is not very conducive towards that kind of activity.

Q: What are the downsides to government controls?

A: Certainly it's always possible that when you add government to the equation that it would invite some forms of corruption and malfeasance – for example, the regulated becoming the regulators – and nothing very effective would get done. But this doesn't necessarily have to happen.

Q: To sum up, then, do sports contribute to economically healthier, more viable communities?

A: I don't think sports contribute to economic viability in a community. They do provide a form of entertainment, engagement, and community identity, and that can be very positive. ■

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY STATES

The range of athletic pursuits and events in the United States is extensive, something that a well-known magazine is in the process of depicting

The weekly *Sports Illustrated*, America's leading sports magazine, has been celebrating its 50th anniversary by profiling some aspect of sports each week in a different one of America's 50 states. "We have had the rare privilege of documenting American sport for the past 50 years and our

football program.

In Maryland each August, more than 1,000 players, from their teens through their 60s, compete in the Ocean City Lacrosse Classic. Lacrosse, not widely played in many other areas of the United States, is one of the state's premier sports



The annual soap box derby, in Akron, Ohio.

anniversary gives us the opportunity to celebrate the role of sports as a force for good in our country," explained *Sports Illustrated* president Bruce Hallett.

The series of articles began last July and will conclude in July of 2004. Taken as a whole when completed, the features will provide a comprehensive and entertaining picture of how Americans play for fun and glory. Here are gleanings of the coverage so far:

In Texas in the fall, high school football on Friday nights is legendary. As onetime college gridiron coach Fred Akers told *Sports Illustrated*, "the phenomenon's hard to explain, but it's in our bones." Up to 10 percent of the student body of the average secondary school participates in the school's

obsessions. "The idea is to have [kids] playing catch before they leave the delivery room," one participant, Casey Connor, observed.

Moab, Utah – a town of 4,800 that has been a popular backdrop for such Hollywood films as *Forrest Gump* and *Thelma and Louise* – draws mountain bikers from around the country for a wildly popular team-relay event each October. And the New River Gorge in rural West Virginia, known – *Sports Illustrated* observes – as "the West of the East," is acknowledged as one of America's most attractive areas for adventure sports fanatics – climbers, rafters, and bikers. Writing about the small community of Fayetteville, Chris Ballard said, "rock jockeys and river rats are embedded in the former

coal mining town like a bolt into granite.”

Virginia, absorbed by football in the fall, turns its attention each May to two prominent equestrian steeplechase events, the Virginia Gold Cup and the International Gold Cup. The state’s rolling rural hills, where momentous battles were fought during the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, are familiarly known as “horse country,” rich in thoroughbred stock. Steeplechase racing has been a staple of the Virginia sports scene since the 18th century.

The state of Ohio is host to what *Sports Illustrated* writer Frank Lidz calls “the wee world of kiddie car racing” – the All-American Soap Box Derby in the city of Akron. For a fleeting moment each year, the Derby establishes the state as “the center of the sporting universe,” in Lidz’s words. The event, which began during Depression-era America, brings together several hundred eight-to-17-year-old boys and girls who race down a 989-foot track in sleek, motor-less fiberglass cars that achieve, with gravity’s aid, a speed of about 30 miles an hour. Contestants reach the Derby by winning local races in communities around the country, which, in the words of one 11-year-old competitor at Akron, means “we’re all champs.”

Arguably, the most riveting sporting event in the state of Pennsylvania, taking place each August, is the 65-year-old Little League World Series, a 10-day tournament that is the chief claim to fame of the town of Williamsport. Now telecast internationally, with major corporate sponsorships, it is the climactic segment of the largest sports youth program in the world. The baseball competition involves nearly three million participants in more than 100 countries, ranging in age from five to 18. On-site audiences generally total 70,000 fans, young and old.

Enhancing the excitement of the competition is the complementary benefit that Little League participants reap from the opportunity to meet and interact with

peers from a wide mix of countries. “I learned a word for ‘hello,’” one young athlete said, “but I’m not sure if it’s Chinese or Japanese!”

During the last week of July each year, Cheyenne, Wyoming, relives a century-old tradition with Frontier Days, the world’s largest outdoor rodeo. More than 10,000 persons attend to watch the competition among bull and saddle bronco riders and other events. And – as is common with so many locally and regionally sponsored sports competitions in the United States – some 2,500 volunteers from Cheyenne and the surrounding area assist in organizing parades, pancake breakfasts, and cultural

entertainment and in setting up a replica of a western frontier town, all to enliven the festival and provide nostalgic glimpses of the region’s past.

If nothing else, the *Sports Illustrated*

anniversary series is underscoring the rich diversity of sports and how they are celebrated in the United States. The range – from surfboard competitions in Hawaii and California to NASCAR auto racing in South Carolina and Florida – seems limitless.

If any one locale tries to bring it all together, it may be Columbia, Missouri, a college town that each summer sponsors what is known as the Show-Me State Games (Show-Me State is Missouri’s nickname). Over the course of several weeks, nearly 30,000 competitors participate in some three-dozen sports that range from basketball, soccer, and track to miniature golf and ping-pong. Participants this past year included an 87-year-old bowler, a 14-year-old legally blind wrestler, and a three-year-old sprinter.

“Our mission,” director Ken Ash told *Sports Illustrated’s* Kelly King, “is getting as many Missourians as possible to participate in activities that promote health and fitness.”

That sounds like a worthy goal for communities everywhere. ■

**FROM POET WALT WHITMAN
WITH WALT WHITMAN IN CAMDEN, BY HORACE TRAUDEL, 1906**

“Well, [baseball] is our game; that’s the chief fact in connection with it. America’s game has the snap, go, fling, of the American atmosphere – belongs as much to our institutions, fits into them as significantly, as our constitutions, laws; is just as important in the sum total of our historic life.”

BY THE NUMBERS

Statistical glimpses of the American sports scene



1. Population of the United States as of 1 December 2003: 292.7 million
2. Number of Americans who watched the professional football 2003 Super Bowl championship on television: 137.7 million
3. Number of fans that follow NASCAR stock car racing: 75 million
4. Number of Americans who played golf in 2000: 26.7 million
5. Number of Americans who played tennis in 2000: 20 million
6. Number of kilometers that competitors swim, bike, and run, respectively, in an Ironman Triathlon: 4.2, 180.2, and 42.2
7. Percentage of foreign-born Major League Baseball players in 2002: 25
8. Percentage of foreign-born National Basketball Association players in the 2000-01 season: 14
9. Percentage of foreign-born Major League Soccer players in 2002: 38
10. Number of women playing on college varsity sports teams in 1971-72: 29,992
11. Number of women playing on college varsity sports teams in 2000-01: 150,916
12. Number of foreign-born student-athletes on university basketball teams in 1993: 135
13. Number of foreign-born student-athletes on university basketball teams in 2002: 366
14. Ratio of high school girls participating in school sports in 1972: 1 in 27
15. Ratio of high school girls participating in school sports in 2002: 1 in 3
16. Number of volunteer youth-sports coaches certified by the National Youth Sports Coaches Association: 1.3 million
17. Number of youth under 19 registered to play soccer in 1980: 888,705
18. Number of youth under 19 registered to play soccer in 2001: 3.9 million
19. Number of women in management positions in the National Basketball Association in 1995: 151

20. Number of women in management positions in the National Basketball Association in 2002: 259

21. Number of blind and visually impaired athletes trained by the United States Association of Blind Athletes: 3,000

22. Number of physically disabled athletes since 1996 who have participated in paralympic sports: 5,000

23. Average annual salary for a player in the National Basketball Association: \$4.5 million

24. Highest one-year salary for basketball star Michael Jordan (1997-98 season with the Chicago Bulls): \$33 million

25. Median household income in the United States in 2002: \$42,409

26. Average annual salary for a secondary school teacher in the United States in 2002: \$46,010

27. Average annual salary for a lawyer in the United States in 2002: \$105,890

28. Average annual salary for a family doctor in the United States in 2002: \$136,260

29. Average cost of stadium construction in the 1950s: \$3.8 million

30. Average cost of stadium construction in the 1990s: \$200 million

31. Estimated value of the New York Yankees baseball franchise: \$849 million

SOURCES FOR "BY THE NUMBERS"

1 U.S. Bureau of the Census: <http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html>; 2 CNN/Sports Illustrated: http://www.cnn.com/football/2003/playoffs/news/2003/01/27/superbowl_ratings_ap/; 3 Los Angeles Times, 8 December 2003; 4, 5 U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2002, Table 1225.; <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/02statab/arts.pdf>; 6 USA Triathlon: http://www.usatriathlon.org/News_Info/news_history_frames.htm; 7-9, Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, University of Central Florida, 2003 Racial and Gender Report Card: http://www.bus.ucf.edu/sport/public/downloads/media/ides/release_report.pdf; 10, 11 The Chronicle of Higher Education, 21 June 2002; 12, 13 USA Today, 11 July 2002; 14, 15 National Association for Girls and Women in Sport, 23 June 2002: <http://www.aahperd.org/nagws/>; 16 National Youth Sports Coaches Association: <http://www.nays.org/about/index.cfm>; 17, 18 U.S. Soccer Foundation: <http://www.sgma.com/reports/data/2002/soccerintheusa2002.pdf>; 19, 20 Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, University of Central Florida, 2003 Racial and Gender Report Card: http://www.bus.ucf.edu/sport/public/downloads/media/ides/release_report.pdf; 21 United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA): <http://www.usaba.org>; 22 U.S. Paralympic Committee, Communications Office: <http://www.usparalympics.org/>; 23 USA Today, 18 March 2003 <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/basketball/nba/2002-2003-nba-salaries-numbers.htm>; 24 New York Times, 19 January 2000; 25 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Profile 2002, Table 3: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profiles/Single/2002/ACS/Tabular/010/01000US1.htm>; 26-28 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics Survey by Occupation, 2002, Table 1: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.t01.htm>; 29-30 Journal of Economic Perspectives, Summer 2000; 31 Forbes.com: http://www.forbes.com/free_forbes/2003/0428/0624tab2.html.

WIT & WISDOM

Observations from those close to the game

“For when the One Great Scorer comes / to write against your name, / He marks – not that you won or lost / But how you played the game.”

Grantland Rice (1880-1954), sportswriter

“I missed over 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot, and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Michael Jordan (born 1963), former professional basketball player

“Winning is habit. Unfortunately, so is losing.”
Vince Lombardi (1913-1970), professional football coach

“Champions keep playing until they get it right.”
Billie Jean King (born 1943), professional tennis player

“[Baseball] is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything is new again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops, and leaves you to face the fall alone.”

A. Bartlett Giamatti (1938-1989), scholar, Yale University president, and commissioner of Major League Baseball

“Half this game is 90% mental.”
Yogi Berra (born 1925), former New York Yankees catcher and member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, famous for his malapropisms.

“A lifetime of training for just ten seconds.”
Jesse Owens (1913-1980), track-and-field athlete and Olympic gold medalist

“Sports do not build character. They reveal it.”
Variously attributed to John Wooden (born 1910), college basketball coach, and Heywood Hale Broun (1918-2001), journalist and author

“When you win, say nothing. When you lose, say less.”
Paul Brown (1908-1991), professional football coach

“The start of a world cross-country event is like riding a horse in the middle of a buffalo stampede. It’s a thrill if you keep up, but one slip and you’re nothing but hoof prints.”
Ed Eyestone (born 1962), marathon runner

“You miss 100% of the shots you never take.”
Wayne Gretzky (born 1961), former professional hockey player

“The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital.”
Joe Paterno (born 1926), college football coach

“When I was a small boy in Kansas, a friend of mine and I went fishing. I told him I wanted to be a real Major League Baseball Player, a genuine professional like Honus Wagner. My friend said that he’d like to be president of the United States. Neither of us got our wish.”
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969), U.S. president 1953-1961

SPORTS AT THE MOVIES

Filmmakers have been inspired to depict the challenge and excitement of sports as well as the exploits of those who play them.

The list of sports genre films is extensive. Here are some of the most popular and critically acclaimed among them.

Bang the Drum Slowly (RATING*: PG, 1973)
Starring: Michael Moriarty and Robert De Niro
Director: John D. Hancock

The star pitcher of a professional baseball team in New York is determined to make the season memorable for his good friend, the team's eccentric catcher, who has learned that he is terminally ill. Based on the novel of the same name by Mark Harris, who also wrote the screenplay.

The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings (PG, 1976)
Starring: Billy Dee Williams, James Earl Jones, and Richard Pryor
Director: John Badham

Set in the late 1930s during the waning years of the Negro Baseball League, charismatic team leader Bingo Long, in a break from the monopolistic dominance of league owners, takes his team of African American players on a barnstorming tour. Based on the novel of the same name by William Brashler.

Breaking Away (PG, 1979)
Starring: Dennis Christopher, Dennis Quaid, and Daniel Stern
Director: Peter Yates

A high school graduate in Indiana, enamored of bicycle racing, Italy's Cinzano racing team, and all other things Italian, joins three friends to take on the Indiana University college students in an annual bike race. Based on the novel of the same name by Steve Tesich, who also wrote the screenplay.

Brian's Song (G, 1971)
Starring: James Caan, Billy Dee Williams, and Jack Warden
Director: Buzz Kulik

This movie is based on the real-life friendship between professional football teammates Brian Piccolo and Gale Sayers and the bond they developed while Piccolo was dying of cancer.

The Color of Money (R, 1986)
Starring: Paul Newman and Tom Cruise
Director: Martin Scorsese

*In this sequel to *The Hustler*, Newman plays pool hustler "Fast" Eddie Felson, and Cruise his talented, young protégé, whom Fast Eddie uses in order to break into the game again. Newman won an Oscar for best actor for this film, widely considered a masterpiece that combines Scorsese's genius for music and camera moves with the game of pool. Based on the novel of the same name by Walter Tevis.*

Downhill Racer (M/PG, 1969)
Starring: Robert Redford and Gene Hackman
Director: Michael Ritchie

In a departure from his customary roles, Robert Redford stars as a thoroughly self-centered, ambitious athlete who joins the U.S. ski team as downhill racer and clashes with the team's coach (Hackman). Based on the novel of the same name by Oakley Hall.

Endless Summer (NOT RATED, 1966)
Starring: Mike Hynson and Robert August
Director: Bruce Brown

Described in reviews as “the definitive surfing movie,” this documentary follows two young surfers around the world in search of the perfect wave.

Field of Dreams (PG,1989)
Starring: Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones, and Burt Lancaster
Director: Phil Alden Robinson

In this evocative slice of Americana, Costner stars as an Iowa farmer who hears voices indicating he should build a baseball diamond in his cornfield. When he does, the ghosts of disgraced professional baseball players appear, along with the farmer’s deceased father, proving that baseball can bring people together—even from beyond the grave. Based on the book, Shoeless Joe, by W.P. Kinsella.

Hoop Dreams (PG-13,1994)
Starring: William Gates, Arthur Agee, and Emma Gates
Director: Steve James

In this three-hour documentary, two inner-city Chicago African-American teenage basketball prodigies struggle to become college basketball players on the way to hoped-for success as professionals.

Hoosiers (PG,1986)
Starring: Gene Hackman, Barbara Hershey, and Dennis Hopper
Director: David Anspaugh

Based on the true story of a small-town Indiana high school basketball team that made the state finals in 1954, this film showcases Hackman as the independent-minded coach who, together with the town alcoholic, leads the team to victory.

The Hustler (NOT RATED,1961)
Starring: Paul Newman, Jackie Gleason, and Piper Laurie
Director: Robert Rossen

Newman fans love his “Fast” Eddie Felson, a small-time but talented and cocky pool hustler with a self-destructive attitude. He challenges “Minnesota Fats” (Gleason) for the world title, and falls for the alcoholic, down-and-out Sarah (Laurie). Based on the novel of the same title by Walter Tevis.

A League of Their Own (PG,1992)
Starring: Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, Lori Petty, and Madonna
Director: Penny Marshall

This comedy brings to life a little-known chapter of American sports history. During the Second World War, with most of the male players drafted into the military, team owners formed the All American Girls Baseball League. Davis and Petty play sisters who join the Rockford Peaches, an Illinois team, and Hanks is their manager.

National Velvet (NOT RATED,1944)
Starring: Elizabeth Taylor, Mickey Rooney, Donald Crisp
Director: Clarence Brown

In the movie that made her a star, Elizabeth Taylor plays a 12-year-old girl whose dreams of entering her horse in Great Britain’s Grand National come true when her mother gives her 100 gold pieces that she herself won for swimming the English Channel as a child. Based on Enid Bagnold’s novel of the same title.

The Natural (PG,1984)
Starring: Robert Redford, Robert Duvall, and Glenn Close
Director: Barry Levinson

In this Depression-era tale, Redford plays middle-aged batter Roy Hobbs, who returns after years of obscurity with the bat he fashioned from a fallen oak when he was 14, to lead a losing team to league dominance. Based on Bernard Malamud’s novel of the same title.

Pride of the Yankees (NOT RATED, 1942)
Starring: Gary Cooper, Teresa Wright, and Babe Ruth (as himself)
Director: Sam Wood

Nominated for 11 Academy awards, this classic brought to the screen the life story of the famed baseball player and American idol of the 1920s and 1930s, Lou Gehrig of the New York Yankees.

Remember the Titans (PG, 2000)
Starring: Denzel Washington, Will Patton, and Wood Harris
Director: Boaz Yakin

Set in Virginia in 1971, just after U.S. schools in the South were racially integrated, this is the true story of an African-American coach appointed to lead a high school basketball team while his white predecessor stays on as assistant coach.

Requiem for a Heavyweight (NOT RATED, 1962)
Starring: Anthony Quinn, Jackie Gleason, Julie Harris, and Mickey Rooney
Director: Ralph Nelson

Considered one of the best boxing movies ever, this is the grim tale of a brain-damaged fighter suffering from too many years in the ring and pushed into round after punishing round by his corrupt manager (Gleason). Quinn's burned-out boxer falls for a shy social worker (Harris), while Gleason fends off a pack of creditors.

Rocky (PG, 1976)
Starring: Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, Carl Weathers, and Burgess Meredith
Director: John G. Avildsen

Winner of the Oscars for best picture and best director, this movie remains the quintessential ode to the underdog. Stallone, who wrote the screen play, portrays Rocky Balboa, an impoverished, down-and-out club fighter, who, when given the chance to fight the world champion, takes perseverance and grit to inspiring levels.

Seabiscuit (PG-13, 2003)
Starring: Jeff Bridges and Chris Cooper
Director: Gary Ross
Script: Gary Ross

This movie is based on the best-selling nonfiction book of the same name by Laura Hillenbrand. It tells the story of Seabiscuit, the knobby-kneed thoroughbred horse that "came from behind" in race after race in the late 1930s to win the hearts of Depression-weary Americans.

Without Limits (PG-13, 1998)
Starring: Billy Crudup and Donald Sutherland
Director: Robert Towne

Billy Crudup plays Steve Prefontaine, or "Pre," a runner in the 1960s with the University of Oregon and the leading American runner as the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich approached. He died in a car crash at age 24.

*THE U.S. MOVIE RATING SYSTEM

We have included the rating of each movie in this list - for example, PG or PG-13 - directly before the year the movie appeared. The movie rating system is a voluntary system sponsored by the Motion Picture Association of America and the National Association of Theatre Owners to provide parents with advance information on films, enabling parents to make judgments on movies in consideration of whether their children should be permitted to see the movie. The rating system began in 1968, so films that came out before that year have no rating. The rating board uses the criteria parents would use when deciding what is suitable viewing for their children. Theme, language, violence, nudity, sex and drug use are among those content areas considered in the decision-making process.

CURRENT RATINGS ARE:

(G) GENERAL AUDIENCE - All ages admitted. This signifies that the film rated contains nothing most parents will consider offensive for even their youngest children to see or hear.

(PG) PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED - Some material may not be suitable for children. This signifies that the film rated may contain some material parents might not like to expose to their young children.

(PG-13) PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED - Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. Parents should be especially careful about letting their younger children attend. Rough or persistent violence is absent; sexually oriented nudity is generally absent; some scenes of drug use may be seen; one use of a harsh, sexually-derived word as an expletive may be heard.

(R) RESTRICTED - Attendance by someone under age 17 requires an accompanying parent or adult guardian. This signifies that the rating board has concluded that the film rated contains some adult material. An R may be assigned due to, among other things, a film's use of language, theme, violence, sex or its portrayal of drug use.

(NC-17) NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED - This signifies that the rating board believes that most American parents would feel that the film is patently adult and that children age 17 and under should not be admitted to it.

SOURCE: THE CLASSIFICATION AND RATING ADMINISTRATION

SPORTS TALK

Many sports terms and expressions have become part of standard American speech. Here are examples, a few of which are so common that even the native speaker has to be reminded that the origin derives from a game or competition.



GENERAL IDIOMS

Catch it—to get into trouble and receive punishment; to understand

“We’re going to *catch it* if she comes back to the office early.”

Play ball—to cooperate with someone

“As soon as both sides sign the contract, then we can *play ball*.”

The way the ball bounces—fate, inevitability, destiny; randomness

“It’s just *the way the ball bounces*, whether your application is accepted or not.”

Sporting chance—a reasonably good possibility

“We thought we had a *sporting chance* when the other company withdrew its bid.”

Whole new ball game—a new set of circumstances

“We found our way around Washington, D.C., without getting lost, but New York City is a *whole new ball game*.”

Ballpark figure—an estimate

“At this time all we need is a *ballpark figure*. Exactness comes later.”

Have the ball in someone’s court—to have to make a response or take action

“We’ve made our proposal, so *the ball’s in their court* now.”

Bench—to withdraw someone; to stop someone from participating

“The director of the play *benched* the lead actress because she was always late for rehearsals.”

On the ball—knowledgeable; competent; attentive

“If we were *on the ball*, the bills would have been paid on time.”

BASEBALL IDIOMS

Be a hit—to please someone; be a success

“The award ceremony *was a hit*, attracting an overflow crowd.”

Step up to the plate—to act; take, accept responsibility

“Mary needs to *step up to the plate* and decide which proposal will best serve the interests of the company.”

Strike out—to fail

“John *struck out* with his book proposal; he received a rejection letter from the publisher today.”

Throw a curve—to fool, surprise; to bring up the unexpected

“The boss *threw us a curve* ball when he announced that each employee would have to bring his own food to the company picnic.”

Off base—unrealistic; inexact; wrong

His cost estimate was way *off base*, far higher than

warranted by current prices for labor and materials.

Out of left field—irrelevant; unexpected
His silly proposals for solving the problem came *out of left field*.

BASKETBALL IDIOMS

Full court press—intense pressure, effort
“The committee put on a *full court press* to collect the necessary funds.”

Slam dunk—tremendous success; outstanding accomplishment
“The show was a *slam dunk* for the artist, who sold every painting he exhibited.”

BOXING IDIOMS

Pull one’s punches—to hold back in one’s criticism
“My English teacher doesn’t *pull any punches* when it comes to discipline. She maintains an orderly classroom.”

Throw in the towel—to quit; to give up
“When they found out he was receiving bribes, the Senator knew it was time to *throw in the towel*.”

Against the ropes—about to fail, be defeated; at the point of exhaustion
“Already having been turned down twice for a loan, John was *against the ropes* when he asked a third

bank to finance the car he had agreed to buy.”

BOWLING IDIOMS

Bowl over—to surprise or overwhelm
“When I heard the news that I got the new job, it *bowed me over*.”

AMERICAN FOOTBALL IDIOMS

End run—to avoid the usual procedures and authorities.
“He made an *end run* around his boss and got money for the project directly from the president of the company.”

Huddle—to gather together to consult
“The board of directors *huddled* to discuss an anticipated protest by workers.”

HORSE RACING IDIOMS

Horse around—to waste time; to be careless
“During the meeting the boss shouted, ‘Stop *horsing around* and get to work.’”

Down to the wire—to complete something at the last minute
“The student went *down to the wire*, turning in her essay just as the class bell rang.”

REFLECTIONS: A FEW KIND WORDS FOR LOSING

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

The writer, drawing on some of his own childhood experiences, reflects on the meaning of sports in one's life and concludes that, in the lessons-learned department, the "agony of defeat" wins out over the "thrill of victory."

When someone once approached Don Ohlmeyer, the well-known American television producer of "Wide World of Sports," saying he had a question he wanted to ask, Ohlmeyer, cutting the man short, replied, "If the question is about sports, the answer is Money." And sports, not only in America but globally, has in recent decades seemed to be chiefly about nothing else: astonishing salaries, hugely lucrative endorsements, television contracts using numbers one is more accustomed to see in textbooks on astronomy.

Yet I myself have always thought that the real sports story was about failure. Sports, athletics generally, is an activity in which even the great winners, the fabled athletes, finally lose, if only because their bodies eventually give out on them and they can no longer do what they once did with what seemed such magnificent ease that it set them apart from other mortals. The basketball player Michael Jordan, who has perhaps known greater athletic glory than any living athlete of our time, now that he can no longer play the game he loves, seems I won't say a tragic but a sad figure. In sports even winners are usually losers, for, as in life itself, so in sports, there are not all that many smooth exits.

But for the average American boy – and girl – for all that athletics builds muscles, instills discipline, if one is lucky adds a bit of character, in the end there is also an *après combat triste* about participation in sports. Considered statistically, a failure factor seems built into most sports. A professional basketball player who misses only half his shots from the field is considered magnificent. A hockey player who makes two shots out of thirty-five shots on goal has

had a brilliant night. No professional baseball player has succeeded in hitting successfully above forty-percent of the time he bats for more than fifty years.

I have on my desk before me pictures of some of the members of the 1955 Kingstree, South Carolina, high school football team, recently sent to me by a friend who played on that team. The photographs are posed, the names of the players, as we say, almost worth the price of admission: here in their slightly antique-seeming uniforms are the McKenzie boys, Bull and Red, Roland Burgess, Needham Williamson, Jimmy Ward, and (my own favorite name) Buddy Gamble. My friend tells me that one of the most heroic among them wound up working as a short-order cook, another lapsed into alcoholism, yet another had a deeply troublesome son. Later, in manhood, trying to get to sleep, did they in their minds replay all those high-school football games, relive those glory days, after which life for many of them was pretty much downhill?

To be sure, many persons have built good lives on successful athletic careers. An outstanding example would be Bill Bradley, who was a great basketball star at Princeton University and later with the professional New York Knickerbockers and then went on to become a United States senator and candidate for the U.S. presidency. Others have gone from athletic prowess to quietly impressive careers in law, medicine, and business, sports doubtless contributing to a confidence related to their already tested ability to operate calmly under pressure.

I grew up not in Kingstree, South Carolina, but on the north side of Chicago, Illinois, during a time when, if you weren't a respectably good athlete, you had better be witty or otherwise find a way to make

yourself seem charming or useful. Our lives were organized around sports, and for us the seasons hadn't the names spring, summer, autumn, winter, but baseball, football, basketball, and (for some) tennis or track. As young boys, our lives were lived in the schoolyard, or hanging around baskets hung on garages in nearby alleys. At home when the newspapers arrived, we read the sports pages first, studying baseball batting averages and the statistics of team standings in the various sports. Television had just begun to be part of the furniture of the American home, and so one watched as many games and events, in the different sports, as time and parents allowed.

From the outset, athletics were exclusionary and taught the lesson of human limitation. Some kids were naturally better than others; there was always the sad situation of the boys who were chosen last in playground pickup games, who were usually exiled to the Siberia of right field in baseball, or assigned to work the coal mines of the interior line in football. Sports also gave a boy his first notice that the world was an unjust place, with gifts parceled out unequally: some boys could run faster, throw harder and farther, jump higher than others – and that was that. Intelligent practice could often make one better at all these games, but only up to a

point. The kids who were naturals – and every schoolyard seemed to have one – could only rarely be surpassed by those who came by their skills through hard work. The world, clearly, was not a fair place.

Well-coordinated, quick, with a strong mimetic sense that allowed me quickly to pick up the moves of older athletes, my early boyhood days in sports were my best ones. But I ran out of luck when I

reached my 4,000-student Chicago high school, where I quickly understood that I was not big enough to compete in football, or good enough to play baseball. I did play freshman-sophomore basketball, and in tennis, along with a boy named Bob Swenson, I eventually won the Chicago Public League doubles championship, where the competition was less than fierce (the better players, groomed by country-club professionals, went to suburban schools).

I learned two hard lessons during my adolescence about my athletic limitations. The first was that I wasn't going to achieve athletically fit size, but would remain, as I am today, smallish and slender. The

second was that I lacked the aggressiveness and physical fearlessness that came naturally to really good athletes. As an athlete, I was like a kamikaze pilot with an insufficient death wish. I was never cowardly, never “chickened-out” or “choked,” as boys then said, but if I could avoid pain on the playing field I didn't at all mind doing so. All I was left with as an athlete, then, was style. I acquired elegant strokes in tennis, a smooth jumpshot in basketball; in both sports, I had all the moves. But style can also imprison an athlete. The first-rate athletes usually both have great style and a readiness to abandon style when victory requires it. They



And so it goes...until the next game.

can do so because they are seriously competitive; they want to win. Those of us entrapped by style want, finally, only to look good.

My inglorious athletic career, then, was essentially over when I was 18. I continued to play tennis for a while, though with increasingly less passion and pleasure. Living in the South, in Arkansas, I played for a couple of years in a YMCA basketball league. In my 40s, I took up the game of racquetball, but a hip

injury forced me to drop it. And so I have long since retired to a comfortable green chair, from which I watch more sporting events than is sensible for a man who prefers to think of himself as cultivated.

As a sports voyeur – I hesitate to use the word fan – I have noticed that not only do my sympathies go out to, but I tend almost completely to identify with, losers. Defeat in athletics seems to me to carry more weight, is more fraught with significance, than victory. The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, the cliché has it, but my guess is that for those who have undergone both, the memory of defeat in sports is stronger and sharper.

I think of the pitcher whose fingers slip a notch, and he serves up a fat pitch that a batter smashes over the wall; of a young man of (say) 19 who, at a crucial moment of a nationally televised college basketball game, misses two free throws that cause his team to be eliminated from an important tournament; of a girl gymnast of 14 who slips and falls off the balance beam at the Olympics; of a tennis player whose concentration and then confidence desert him against a weaker opponent; of a sprinter, a world record in sight, who pulls up lame just before the finish line; of a golfer who taps his ball a tad too gently and so misses a putt that would have earned him half-a-million dollars in prize money One could add to this list almost endlessly; the point, of course, is that in sports small, often unexpected, things can change a game, a season, a career, a life.

Coaches and inspirational speakers are fond of positing sports as a metaphor for life. As in life, so in sports, unremitting labor is said to pay off, obstacles

are there to be surmounted, desire can sometimes be more important than talent. From here it is only a small jump to the conclusion that sports build character and it is character that always wins out in life. The best one can say in response to this is, it would be nice to think so.

But one wonders if athletic failure isn't ultimately truer to life than victory. Without meaning to be unduly gloomy about it, in life some people for a while have much better runs than others, but in the end we are all losers: the unexpected trips us up, we suffer setbacks, few are permitted to cross or even

get near the finish line intact, the mortality rate – *mirabile dictu* – remains at an even 100 percent, and after the game the likelihood is that none of us is going, as American baseball and football players like to say after winning a championship, to Disney World. Three cheers for the winners,

then, but save a couple more for all of us who do not win, and who can use the applause even more. ■

**FROM NOVELIST PAT CONROY
MY LOSING SEASON, 2002**

"Losing prepares you for the heartbreak, setback and tragedy that you will encounter in the world more than winning ever can. By licking your wounds you learn how to avoid getting wounded the next time....The word 'loser' follows you, bird-dogs you, sniffs you out of whatever fields you hide in because you have to face things clearly and you cannot turn away from what is true. My team won eight games and lost seventeen . . . losers by any measure."

Joseph Epstein, well-known essayist and author of numerous works of fiction and nonfiction, recently received a National Humanities Medal from President George W. Bush at a White



House ceremony for his efforts to deepen public awareness of the humanities. Epstein teaches English and writing at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

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BACK COVER: Marion Jones, the gold medalist in the women's 100 meters at the 2000 Olympic Games in Australia.

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