

On Sportsmanship and “Running Up the Score”¹

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I wish to argue against a widely-held view concerning sportsmanship. I call this view the *Anti-Blowout* thesis (AB):

AB: It is intrinsically unsporting for players or teams to maximize the margin of victory after they have secured victory in a one-sided contest.²

Having elaborated on the thesis in Section I, I present my main arguments against it in Section II. Section III is devoted to showing that none of several currently favored theories of sportsmanship supports the AB thesis. Section IV is a qualified conclusion.

I

The sporting community (players, coaches, and journalists) seems almost unanimous in condemning the pursuit of lopsided victories, which is described in such derogatory terms as “running up the score” and “showing up” the losing team. For instance, the University of Michigan’s 61–7 defeat of Houston’s football team in 1992 was greeted with howls of delight that Houston had been given a taste of its own medicine. The “grossly classless behavior” which, according to a Detroit sports journalist, earned Houston such heavy retribution, was its own habit of running up the score against outmatched opponents. Similarly, in the early 1980s, a Big Ten football coach was outraged when the opposing team, already ahead by several touchdowns, scored another touchdown on a long passing play in the game’s closing moments. After the play, the coach led his entire team onto the field and drew its attention to the scoreboard, which indicated the few seconds remaining to play. They stood there for several seconds contemplating the scoreboard, presumably vowing bloody revenge for this humiliation when the teams met the following season.

Apparently the sporting thing for victorious teams to do on such occasions would be to “go easy” on their opponents. They should insert second- and third-string players, and mercifully run out the clock with time-consuming running plays, gracefully coasting to victory without compounding the losers’ suffering.

The AB thesis is widely held in both college and professional sport, especially football. It is also applied to some extent in basketball, and even in baseball. For instance, eyebrows would be raised if the visiting team, already ahead 12–0 in the top of the ninth inning, attempted to pad the lead by bunting and stealing bases.

The few passing references to this issue that I have been able to find by philosophers indicate that they share the AB view, albeit in a less extreme form. For instance, Randolph M. Feezell (2: p. 2) states that “running up the score on an opponent . . . is bad form, somehow inappropriate because it violates the nature of what sport is about.” He considers the fictitious coach Smith, who intimidates both players and referees, ruthlessly pursues victory by all means short of cheating, believes that the only thing wrong with cheating itself is being caught, *and would willingly run up the score if it improved his team’s rating and tournament seeding*: “Smith has an impoverished view of sport, an impoverished experience of sport, and it is just such views and attitudes that tend to generate unsportsmanlike behavior in sport” (2: pp. 4–5).

Warren P. Fraleigh (3: pp. 180–190) discusses what he calls “the problem of right action in the uneven contest” at considerable length, showing the complexity of the moral considerations that are relevant to this matter. However, he does not attempt to defend a position on this issue, since his goal is rather to use this example to illustrate a *method* of dealing with value conflicts in general. A virtue of his analysis is that he shows that many options are open to the team leading by a wide margin, ranging from actually allowing the losing team to score a few “consolation” points, to aggressively pursuing an even greater margin of victory. Intermediate tactics include substituting less competent players, or trying out new tactics and strategies (3: p. 181). What is of most interest for my discussion is that Fraleigh (3: p. 184) includes as a reason against tactics that increase the chance of a lopsided victory the fact that “such action would be viewed by other sports agents and spectators as ‘running up the score,’ intentionally, which is a negatively sanctioned act and contrary to courtesy.”

Finally, in a discussion of Fraleigh’s views, R. Scott Kretchmar (8: p. 28) suggests in passing that Fraleigh may have to defend the view that, even when a team has an invincible lead, its players are obligated to play their hardest until the end of the game. This is because Fraleigh believes that the central nonmoral value involved in all sporting contests is “knowledge of relative abilities to move mass in space and time in the ways prescribed by the rules” (8: p. 28). Such knowledge is possible only if both teams play to the maximum of their abilities for the duration of the contest. Kretchmar suggests that other nonmoral values may deserve consideration alongside, even in opposition to, the acquisition of knowledge. In the context of uneven contests, one such value would be avoiding the “psychically painful embarrassment” experienced by those who suffer heavy defeats (8: p. 28).³ Though Kretchmar does not directly raise the issue, this value could be used in support of the AB view.

II

I agree that it *would* be churlish to refuse to relent in a friendly, recreational racquetball game against a completely outmatched opponent. What was meant to be fun would be turned into an exhausting, frustrating ordeal for the other player. In contrast, holding off would help her to improve her game and would

lead to longer rallies, making the game more enjoyable for both players. In the same way, an experienced adult chess player should not repeatedly overwhelm a young child whom she is teaching how to play. This might fuel the adult's ego, but would also very likely discourage the child to the point of destroying her interest in chess. Deliberately making weak moves, and even allowing the child to win occasionally, would be a far more appropriate way to help the child to enjoy and improve her game. In both cases, "going for the jugular" would destroy the purpose of the game: recreation and nurturing, respectively.

In contrast, my main thesis in this paper is that there is absolutely nothing intrinsically wrong with pressing for a lopsided victory in a *competitive* game, whether it be football, basketball, soccer, or any other sport. While values such as mercy and mutual enjoyment are also relevant to competitive sport, the introduction of the element of competition makes complaints voiced by proponents of the AB view inappropriate. The distinction I draw between recreational and competitive sports parallels that made by James W. Keating (7) between sport and athletics,⁴ though in Section IIIB I will consider an objection to his distinction.

It might be *unwise* for a coach to risk injuries to key players and waste a golden opportunity to give second-string players some playing time and perhaps try out novel plays and strategies in a low-risk setting. However, I reject the received wisdom among AB advocates that winning a game by a wide margin is not just unwise, but positively *unsporting*.

One line of argument for this mistaken belief is a rather distasteful attitude toward sport: Winning is the only thing that matters. If this were so, it would indeed be gratuitous to continue to score points long after victory, the game's only goal, has been secured. However, the premise is false: Winning is *not* the only thing that matters. Players who win blowouts can be justly proud of their display of athletic excellence, the personal and team records they have set, and the excitement provided for fans.

Even if it is granted that there is more to sport than winning, the feeling persists that there is still something cruel in inflicting one-sided defeats. Underlying this feeling is an attitude toward sport that can be used to mount a second, more plausible argument for the AB thesis: Players who suffer lopsided defeats have been humiliated and diminished as human beings. The fact that the AB thesis is most often cited in football and basketball, both of which involve considerable contact, suggests that the macho notion of sport as a test of manhood is also involved.⁵

This attitude has lost sight of the element of play in all sports, at whatever level, and regardless of their business aspect.⁶ Moreover, even on a view such as Fraleigh's (3), which regards the determination of athletic superiority as the essential value of sport,⁷ there is absolutely no disgrace in suffering a heavy defeat by a far stronger team. While they do indicate athletic ability, neither victory nor defeat affects one's worth as a human being. What *does* reflect players' character is how hard and fairly they play, and how they conduct themselves in defeat and victory.

It might be countered that a lopsided defeat does humiliate the loser, not as a human being, but *as an athlete*, and that this is why it is unsporting to inflict such defeats. Athletes take pride in their ability and effort, and blowouts are an affront to this pride.

My response involves distinguishing between weak and strong humiliations. In the weak sense of "reducing to a lower position,"⁸ any defeat, not just a blowout, is by definition a humiliation of the loser qua athlete. Inflicting humiliation in this harmless sense is the inevitable outcome of most competitive activities. Only in the strong sense of causing shame or disgrace does humiliating someone become a moral issue. And it isn't clear that an athlete is humiliated qua athlete in this stronger sense by the fact that her opponent is far stronger. The only cause for shame after a heavy defeat would be knowing, for example, that I did not play to the best of my ability, or that I gave up trying. A heavy defeat is in and of itself no cause for shame.

More appropriate occasions for feelings of strong humiliation would be the revelation of a moral fault (e.g., cheating), a nonmoral character fault (such as the lack of persistence I show if I give up too easily in my defeat), or an act of gross stupidity or incompetence. Suffering a heavy defeat to a far stronger athlete or team reveals no such failing. In general, the fact that someone else is far better than me at *x*-ing strongly humiliates me neither qua *x*-er nor as a human being. Why should sport be regarded differently than other activities? Even if one confines attention to the person *qua athlete*, then, the claim that she is strongly humiliated by a heavy defeat indicates an inflated estimate of the importance of the outcome of sporting contests.

The AB thesis seems to require that a team which is far stronger should *conceal* the extent of its superiority by easing up. An analogy from the academic world may be helpful. When a student makes a comment in class that indicates a misunderstanding of an elementary point, the sensitive instructor will give the comment the most favorable reading possible and gently lead the student to a better understanding. At a professional meeting, in contrast, an academic will not hesitate to point out an error made by a peer. This can be done in a respectful, nonconfrontational way, just as a team can win a contest by a wide margin while still showing respect for its opponents. The suggestion that an academic should diplomatically try to conceal the error made by her peer is condescending. A vastly superior team should treat its opponents just as an academic would treat a colleague, not as she would treat a student.

None of this is to deny that malevolent coaches and players may maximize the margin of victory precisely in order to humiliate their opponents. The wrongness of such actions consists in the *intention* to harm, since, if my analysis is correct, such defeats do not actually humiliate the losers in the strong, harmful sense. Such behavior is just as reprehensible as any deliberate attempt to humiliate others, and may justly be called "running up the score." My point is that one can also pursue a lopsided victory *without* any intention to humiliate one's opponent, and that there is nothing wrong with such victories. Heavy defeats are not intrinsically humiliating in the strong sense that is *prima facie* morally wrong.

However, partly because some teams arguably do intend to humiliate the opponents they beat by a wide margin, a connection has been forged in American sporting consciousness between lopsided victories and humiliation. Even if the winning team has no such malevolent intentions, the losers are likely to *infer* them, and to *feel* humiliated, anyway. Consequently, an objection to my view is that respect for the feelings of opponents should prevent teams from pursuing victory by a wide margin, however innocent the motives behind the victory would have been.

Certainly the way an action will be perceived is one of the factors that should be considered in evaluating that action. However, if people's negative perception of the action is based on a misconception—as I claim is the case with the view that lopsided victories strongly humiliate the opponent—it carries little weight as an objection to the action. For instance, the fact that interracial relationships would have shocked and even offended people in southern states in the 1950s sheds more light on the prejudice of the offended people than it does on the morality of interracial relationships. Those who lose sporting contests by a wide margin may *feel* humiliated, but, if my argument in the last few paragraphs is sound, they have not *in fact* been strongly humiliated, either as human beings or as athletes. Consequently, the existence of such feelings does not justify moral condemnation of teams pursuing victory by a wide margin. We might hope that, as a less inflated estimate of the importance of the outcome of sporting contests prevails, such groundless feelings of humiliation will become less and less common. Consequently, malicious athletes and teams will be less and less tempted to inflict heavy defeats in a misguided attempt to harm their opponents.

When one strips away these two mistaken attitudes toward sport—winning is the only thing that matters, and heavy defeat is a serious affront to one's humanity or to one's status as an athlete—there remains no good reason to criticize teams for pursuing high scores in one-sided victories. As long as the winning team shows respect for the losers (which is perfectly compatible with winning a soccer game by 10 goals, or a football game by 50 points), no apology is needed for an exciting display of skill and athleticism. What *does* show a lack of respect for outmatched opponents is mocking and taunting them, and this will often be a distinguishing feature of the deliberate attempts to humiliate opponents that I do condemn.

An unlikely source of support for my view was provided by the opponents of the U.S. "Dream Team" in the 1992 Olympic basketball tournament. Despite being thoroughly outmatched, they played with great enthusiasm and spirit, clearly enjoying every minute they shared the court with the NBA legends. They understood, far better than proponents of the AB thesis, that a lopsided defeat in sport need mean no more than a lopsided difference in ability.

What *was* distasteful was the jingoistic buildup to the Olympics, fueled by NBC's promotional "spots" for the Dream Team's imminent display of American superiority. This chauvinism has nothing to do with sportsmanship, and everything to do with the mistaken view that sport is a test of the worth of a human being or a nation.

III

My concern in this section is not to propose a new analysis of sportsmanship. Instead, my purpose is to show that my view comports far better than the AB thesis with the most plausible models of sportsmanship that have been proposed.

A

I will consider first an influential account of sportsmanship developed by Keating (7). His view is best understood in contrast to a model of sportsmanship that *would* condemn lopsided victories: the "Eton" view of sport prevalent in

English public (i.e., exclusive and private!) schools in past centuries.⁹ Sport was played by gentlemen for the intrinsic pleasure of playing, rather than for the purpose of winning. Amateurism was encouraged, excessive preparation for a sporting event was considered bad form,¹⁰ and players and coaches were expected to value a "good game," an equal contest, as more important than achieving superiority. Since even strenuous efforts to win a game were frowned upon, this model would clearly not tolerate the pursuit of victory by a wide margin.

Keating's account of sportsmanship is based on the distinction between recreational ("sport") and competitive ("athletics") contests. The different purpose of each of these two activities gives rise to a different conception of sportsmanship. Since the purpose of recreational sport is "pleasant diversion—the immediate joy to be derived in the activity itself—the pivotal or essential virtue in sportsmanship is generosity" (7: p. 34). While generosity does not require the adoption of the Eton model, it calls for moderation on the part of the person or team with an insurmountable lead in a friendly game. Such moderation will help "to avoid all unpleasantness and conflict and to cultivate, in their stead, an unselfish and cooperative effort" (7: p. 34). This insight underlies my own support for the AB thesis in purely recreational sport. What little plausibility the Eton model has is confined to recreational sport. It is wholly inadequate, however, when applied to competitive sport, and hence cannot be used to undercut my arguments against the AB thesis in the context of this type of sport.

Competitive sport (athletics), according to Keating (7: p. 33), has the different purpose of "the objective and accurate determination of superior performance and, ultimately, of excellence." The corresponding concept of sportsmanship is hard but fair play. A similar view of the purpose of competitive sport is expressed by Warren P. Fraleigh: "to provide equitable opportunity for mutual contesting of the relative abilities of the participants to move mass in space and time within the confines prescribed by an agreed-upon set of rules" (3: p. 41).

While this paradigm clearly excludes cheating, in no way does it deem lopsided victories as unsporting. If anything, if the runaway winner eases up in the later stages of the game, the purpose of determining athletic excellence is *undermined*. It is true that the contestants' "relative abilities" have already been determined by this stage in the sense of a *rank ordering*. However, an eight-goal margin of victory may more accurately reflect, for instance, the relative abilities of two soccer teams than a still-comfortable three-goal difference. The margin of victory gives a tangible *quantitative measure* of the relative abilities of the teams. Those who complain that continuing to score goals long after victory has been achieved is gratuitous and unsporting are guilty of a simplistic reduction of the comparative purpose of competitive sport to the categories of "winners" and "losers." Moreover, the interest of competitive sport goes beyond a comparison between the contestants. We are also interested in assessing their abilities in comparison with other athletes and teams, both past and present, as is evidenced by the assiduous attention given to sporting records. The attempt to make quantitative comparisons between contestants, and to maintain the integrity of sporting records, would be sabotaged if easing up in a sporting event once victory is secured were to become common practice.¹¹

In defense of the AB thesis, it might be objected that the actual context of many blowouts is far removed from the accurate measure of athletic ability

that Keating and Fraleigh believe is central to sport. In college athletics, lopsided victories often result from a team's desire to "pad" its record, and thus improve its national ranking, by deliberately scheduling weak opponents. Such blowouts are meaningless as a measure of the ability of the winning team, since the outmatched losers present no serious challenge. Since the goal of measuring athletic ability is not met, the charge remains that lopsided victories involve the gratuitous infliction of suffering.¹²

I have three responses. First, this objection is confined to the Fraleigh/Keating view of the purpose of competitive sport discussed in this subsection. Lopsided victories may serve *other* goals of sport, such as providing excitement for fans, and hence may avoid being gratuitous.

Second, I reject the assumption that a lopsided victory over an outmatched opponent gives no measure of athletic excellence. While the superior team's victory may never be in doubt, its manner of victory can be most revealing. Even when the opponent is weak, an exciting display of offensive firepower, full of skill and imagination, can be a testament to a team's strength. By the same token, a narrow, lackluster victory over a clearly inferior team will often justifiably result in a lower national ranking for the winning team. Throughout the world of soccer, including the World Cup, "goal difference" is used as a tie-breaker. Of all the methods of tie-breaking, this is the least controversial, since people recognize that the ability to score and prevent goals over a series of games, especially over a whole season, is a reliable measure of excellence in soccer. More generally, as pointed out previously, the practice of record keeping in sports reflects the belief that scores in a game, season, or career are a meaningful basis for comparison between athletes and teams.

Third, and most important, the objection is addressed primarily to the *scheduling* of contests that are known in advance to be uneven, not to lopsided victories themselves. This type of scheduling may result in an unrealistically inflated win-loss record for the stronger team, and hence undermine the reliability of national standings (although those responsible for the standings may be able to take into account the quality of a team's opponents when they decide on its ranking). However, the arguments I have presented so far indicate that once a contest has been scheduled, there is nothing unsporting about pursuing victory by a wide margin, as long as respect is shown for the losing team.

In sum, if the primary purpose of competitive sport is to determine relative athletic ability, then the pursuit of emphatic victories may be not only compatible with sportsmanship, but even required by it. However, we now need to consider rival models of sportsmanship based on different views of the purpose of sport.

B

Randolph Feezell (2) rejects the sharp distinction between recreational and competitive sport (sport and athletics) that underlies Keating's two-level theory of sportsmanship. Whereas Keating excludes keen competition from his account of recreational sport, and playfulness from his account of competitive sport, Feezell argues that both the serious desire to win and a sense of playfulness are involved, in varying degrees, in all sport. The person who engages in sport

is simultaneously player and athlete. His purpose is to win the contest *and* to experience the playful and aesthetic delights of the experience. His attitudes are at once both playful and competitive, and these color his relationship with his fellow participants. He sees his opponent as both competitor and friend, competing and cooperating at the same time. (2: p. 6)

Keating's account of sportsmanship in *competitive* sport, which is my main concern in this paper, is inadequate, Feezell argues, because it would sanction brutal, no-holds-barred competition, as long as one stays within the letter of the rules of the game. Such an attitude is actually more like an instance of bad sportsmanship, since it "ignores the unwritten rules of playing . . . and tends to destroy the spirit of play" (2: p. 7).

Once we recognize that "sport is a formal, competitive variety of human play" (2: p. 7), a more appropriate model of sportsmanship would accommodate the playfulness that Keating confines to purely recreational sport. At the same time, the person whose attitude is so playful that she makes no serious effort to win the game is being unsporting in a completely different way: failing to respect the importance of trying one's hardest in competitive sport. Feezell's model of sportsmanship is an Aristotelian mean

between excessive seriousness, which misunderstands the importance of the play-spirit, and an excessive sense of playfulness, which might be called frivolity and which misunderstands the importance of victory and achievement when play is competitive. (2: p. 10)

A certain degree of seriousness is needed in order to experience the pleasure of competition, but at the same time this very seriousness creates the danger of alienating, unsporting behavior.¹³

In defense of Keating, Feezell's accusation that Keating's account of sportsmanship in competitive sport would permit an unsporting obsession with winning within the letter of the rules may be unfair. After all, Keating (7: p. 35) bases his account of sportsmanship on his belief that *honorable* victory is the goal of participants in competitive sport. The player who constantly badgers the referee, and who rudely but legally tries to "psych out" her opponent, may not violate the purpose of an "objective and accurate determination of superior performance," but her victory is certainly not honorable. However, Keating's account of sportsmanship may be circular, in that exactly what kind of behavior *is* honorable is the very point in question in explaining sportsmanship.

At first blush, Feezell's account of sportsmanship, which includes playfulness as well as competitiveness, would be less tolerant of one-sided victories than would the Keating/Fraleigh model, which puts primary emphasis on sport as a fair and accurate assessment of the relative ability of the contestants. Shouldn't the competitive urge to achieve a high score be tempered by a generous desire to ease up and soften the impact of defeat on the losers? As we saw in Section I, Feezell himself believes so. However, I have two arguments that show why Feezell's account of sportsmanship does not support the AB thesis.

First, the value of generosity that calls for easing up in one-sided games is a moral value more germane to the model of sportsmanship, to be discussed in the next subsection, based on altruism. Playfulness is a more aesthetic, even hedonistic concept, which does not clearly require generosity. This is not to

suggest that the spirit of playfulness places no moral demands on competitors. Not only cheating, but any form of disrespect for opponents, is directly contrary to the spirit of playfulness. The trash talking and taunting of opponents practiced by some basketball players and admired by some sports journalists and fans are clearly ruled out by Feezell's account of sportsmanship. However, as I argued in Section II, beating an outmatched team by a wide margin is in itself not in the least disrespectful. The belief that it is disrespectful is based on the mistaken notion, criticized previously, that a heavy defeat diminishes losers as human beings, or disgraces them as athletes.

Second, continuing to play strenuously even after victory has been secured is actually more congruent with the spirit of playfulness than is easing up. There is nothing in the least bit playful when the football team that is ahead by five touchdowns devotes the entire fourth quarter to grinding out time-consuming, conservative running plays, motivated by the desire to avoid "showing up" the outmatched opponents. Such time-wasting would be openly booed by soccer fans. It reinforces the distinctly *unplayful* attitude that the game is effectively over once the sole goal of winning has been guaranteed. Genuine playfulness would consist of continuing to entertain the fans with exciting, innovative plays, taking advantage of the freedom that is provided by having already secured victory. Not only would this enable the winning team to celebrate its excellence, it would also give the opponents the opportunity to demonstrate their pride and character by continuing to compete hard and fairly against superior opponents, and to score "consolation" points. The opponents of the U.S. basketball team in the 1992 Olympics were especially gracious in this regard.

None of this is to deny the value of substituting backup players for starters in uneven contests. Aside from the prudence of not risking injury to key players, team morale will be improved by sharing the fun, and these values may well outweigh the importance of creating scoring records and giving an objectively accurate measure of the winning team's superiority. In any event, inserting second-string players does not guarantee that the margin of victory will be minimized. They are perfectly justified in taking advantage of their rare minutes of playing time by playing hard. It would be unfair to demand that they refrain from inflicting heavy defeats, and thus deny themselves the opportunity to showcase their abilities.¹⁴

My point in this subsection has been that neither starters nor backups are required to ease up in uneven contests by Feezell's model of sportsmanship as a mean between competitiveness and playfulness.

C

The strongest support for the AB thesis comes from models of sportsmanship that put more explicit emphasis on moral values.¹⁵ Peter J. Arnold (1: p. 66) has developed a model of sportsmanship "as a form of altruistically motivated conduct that is concerned with the good or welfare of another." He argues that there is more to sportsmanship than the mere observance of the rules of the game or the unwritten rules of fair play. The paradigm case of sportsmanship is the athlete who acts altruistically, even if this action diminishes her chance of victory, for instance, the runner who stops to help a badly injured competitor (1: pp. 67-69).

Arnold does not characterize such sportsmanlike acts as supererogatory, since this is the language of duties, albeit "imperfect" ones, based on universal principles.¹⁶ Instead, he puts altruism and sportsmanship in the context of an ethic of care, based on the sympathetic responses we have to particular individuals.¹⁷

Arnold's view makes more stringent demands on the athlete than any of the other models of sportsmanship we have considered. The sporting athlete not only facilitates a fair contest that accurately reflects the participants' abilities, and behaves in the spirit of playfulness; she also responds altruistically to her rival should the need arise, even if this impairs her chance of victory. The question before us is whether the altruistic athlete will take pity and refrain from lopsided victories over outmatched opponents. In other words, does Arnold's model of sportsmanship support the AB thesis?

In considering this question, we should first note that Arnold's account of sportsmanship differs from the others we have examined in one crucial respect. These other models present sportsmanship in the form of mandatory moral prescriptions. For instance, the person who cheats, or who violates the playful spirit of sport, exhibits the vice of bad sportsmanship. Arnold, in contrast, regards sportsmanlike acts as those that go beyond the call of duty (though, for reasons already explained, he prefers to characterize them as altruistic, rather than as supererogatory, a term which belongs to the ethics of duty). His examples of sportsmanship are heroic acts of altruism, where an athlete jeopardizes her own chances of victory out of sympathy for the plight of a rival. While few would deny Arnold's claim that such actions "exemplify the best traditions of sportsmanship," the competitor who does *not* perform them is guilty of no moral failing.¹⁸ Viewed in this light, the practice of easing up on outmatched opponents is at best an optional act of mercy, and players who do not do so are innocent of bad sportsmanship.

Moreover, the account of victories by a wide margin that I have developed throughout this paper indicates that suffering a heavy defeat is hardly the kind of disaster that calls for spontaneous acts of altruism by the victor. To paraphrase a point made earlier, a lopsided defeat need reflect only a lopsided difference in performance, and in no way disgrace the loser. Heroic acts of altruism are better reserved for athletes who are genuinely in need of help, such as Arnold's (1: p. 67) example of the marathon runner who, "at the cost of victory, stops to help a fellow runner in a state of distress." Though he uses it to illustrate a different model of sportsmanship, another of Arnold's (1: p. 63) examples also indicates a more appropriate occasion for the altruism which he endorses: Tennis player Mats Wilander corrected a call made by the umpire in the French Open in 1982, even though the call had been in his favor and had given him match point.

The exercise of altruism in the case of the bad tennis call would also be endorsed by the Keating/Fraleigh view of sportsmanship as facilitating a fair and accurate measurement of the rivals' abilities. Wilander's sportsmanlike intervention ensured that the game's outcome depended on a fair application of the game's rules, and not on an error by the umpire. In contrast, when the reason for a one-sided victory is nothing other than a vast difference in ability, there is no need to "go easy" on the losers in the name of the Keating/Fraleigh view of sportsmanship.

Arnold's model of sportsmanship fails to support the AB thesis. First, it relegates sportsmanship to the status of optional acts of altruism, making it inappropriate to condemn the failure to perform such acts as easing up on out-

matched opponents. Second, even within the realm of optional acts of altruism, they are better reserved for fellow competitors who are genuinely in need of help than extended to people whose only misfortune is to be losing a competitive sporting contest by a wide margin.

IV

This paper should not be construed as endorsing the obsessive pursuit of massive victories in competitive sport. The value of resting key players, giving second-string players valuable and enjoyable game experience, and trying out untested strategies may often outweigh the value of pursuing victories that accurately reflect the full extent of the winning team's superiority. Even less should it be construed as endorsing the cruel, contemptuous attitude toward the losers exhibited by the team that runs up the score in a deliberate (but misguided) attempt to humiliate its opponents. Any plausible model of sportsmanship, including all those examined here, requires that all competitors show mutual respect at all times. Mocking, taunting, and gloating at outmatched opponents is despicable. The sportsmanlike victors should thank the losers for the game, and console them for their obvious disappointment.

My only goal has been to show that no sound arguments, including those based on the models of sportsmanship currently in favor, give any good reason for condemning the pursuit of victory by a wide margin as intrinsically unsporting. It might be objected that this only shows the inadequacy of current models of sportsmanship, and that we should develop a new model that *does* condemn the pursuit of runaway victories. However, the models considered here are all supported by careful theoretical arguments and produce plausible analyses of sporting behavior in a wide variety of situations. To reject them, and to build an ad hoc theory, all in the name of the unshakable intuition that lopsided victories are unsporting, creates the suspicion that the intuition is no more than a prejudice.

Interesting though it is in its own right, discussion of the AB thesis is most valuable for the light it sheds on prevailing American attitudes toward sport. While the thesis is ostensibly offered as a merciful corrective to ruthless competition, further analysis has revealed, ironically, that it presupposes views that are ill suited to the spirit of sportsmanship.

First, the AB thesis may be based on the view, condemned by all plausible accounts of sportsmanship, that winning is the only thing that matters in sport. Second, it assumes that suffering a heavy defeat is an affront to one's status as an athlete, if not as a human being. While this mistaken attitude is in itself inoffensive, it reflects a gross overestimation of the importance of the outcomes of sporting contests, and this overestimation may well be associated with unquestionably unsporting behavior. Huge financial incentives already exist for cheating, illicit drug use, and other violations of sportsmanship in both college and professional athletics. To add to these financial incentives the view that defeat brings disgrace on the loser only increases the temptation to resort to unsporting means to achieve victory.¹⁹

Notes

¹⁹To conform to standard usage, and to avoid unwieldy expressions, I have reluctantly used the term *sportsmanship*. I trust that my routine use of *she* as a generic personal pronoun will allay any concerns that my use of *sportsmanship* has a masculinist intent.

²I add the qualifier *intrinsically* because, as I explain in Section II, I do condemn those who pursue lopsided victories *in order to* humiliate their opponents. If my main argument is sound, however, even these deliberate attempts do not actually humiliate the losers in a morally objectionable way.

³One wonders why Kretchmar classifies this as a nonmoral value. Minimizing suffering is very much a moral value, at least on a utilitarian approach.

⁴See Section IIIA for more detail on Keating's view.

⁵It may be no coincidence that both football and basketball are time-based sports, in which the contest continues for a specified time, regardless of the score. A point may be reached, well before time expires, when one team has no realistic chance of winning. The AB thesis is most plausible in precisely such situations in time-based sports. In score-based sports such as tennis, on the other hand, play continues until a certain score has been reached, regardless of the time elapsed. In such sports, dramatic comebacks are feasible until the final point has been played, and we are unlikely to criticize as unsporting the behavior of a player who pads her lead in order to reduce the likelihood of such a comeback.

What this shows is that there is a reason for trying to maximize the margin of victory in score-based sports that does not exist in time-based sports. I maintain, however, that in neither case is it unsporting to pursue one-sided victories. I am grateful to Michael Meyer for the distinction between these two kinds of sport.

⁶See Section IIIB for a more detailed discussion of the role of play in sport.

⁷See Section IIIA.

⁸*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1990), p. 587.

⁹See Arnold (1: p. 62), and Keating (7: pp. 32-34).

¹⁰British disdain for what was considered as excessive American zeal for training is given a remarkably favorable portrayal in the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*.

¹¹I do not mean to suggest that sporting scores are "transitive," in the sense that if A beats B by x points, and B beats C by y points, it follows that A will beat C by $x + y$ points. The value of keeping records, rather, is that figures such as the total points or goals scored by a player or team over a season can provide a meaningful measure of excellence and basis for comparison with other players and teams, both past and present.

¹²I am grateful to a reviewer of the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* for this objection.

¹³See Hyland (5: pp. 68-69).

¹⁴I am grateful to a reviewer of the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* for this point.

¹⁵All theories of sportsmanship are evaluative, in that sportsmanship is an inherently normative concept. Sportsmanship is by definition a virtue, and being a bad sport is by definition a moral failing. I distinguish Arnold's view because he defines sportsmanship in terms of the moral virtue of altruism, whereas the other views define it in terms of facilitating the nonmoral goals of sport.

¹⁶For the distinction between perfect duties ("duties of justice") and imperfect duties ("duties of benevolence"), see Kant (6: pp. 191-195).

¹⁷For two formulations of an ethic of care, see Gilligan (4) and Manning (9).

¹⁸A more comprehensive account of sportsmanship would combine mandatory requirements of the kind explained by Keating, Fraleigh, and Feezell, along with Arnold's insight that the highest level of sportsmanship is exemplified by optional acts of altruism that exceed these minimal requirements. Developing such an account is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁹I am grateful to the reviewers of the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* for helpful suggestions, to Sterling Harwood for encouraging me to write this paper and for extensive written feedback, and to Mike Meyer for his incisive and generous criticisms.

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