Counterspace

Boston sucks! A psychoanalysis of sports

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Abstract This article theorizes psychoanalytically about sports, contending that its unconscious appeal is driven by tendencies for repetition, loss and self-subversion. Serving as a form of conscious entertainment and escape, sports fandom offers a valuable glimpse into the structure of subjectivity and the dynamics of enjoyment. Using Lacanian theorizing, the article describes how the excess of professional sports has to be thought inextricably in relation to lack. An avid and life-long sports fan, the author further explores the possibilities of being an ethical fan if the unconscious enjoyment sports provides lies in our fantasied encounter with our own contradiction and limits.
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Introduction

As a sports fan, I am fortunate to have cheered for many winners. Not to brag – but of course to brag, since that is the conduct of a fan – here are some of my favorite moments of triumph:

- the New York Yankees (baseball) winning the 1996 World Series in a comeback against Atlanta
- the back-to-back National Basketball Association (NBA) Finals appearances by the New Jersey Nets (2002–3)

- the New York Giants (American football) overcoming the New England Patriots in the 2007 and 2011 Super Bowls
- the Los Angeles Lakers (basketball) beating the Boston Celtics in 2010 in Game 7 of the NBA championship
- Manny Pacquaio (boxing) besting Oscar De La Hoya by technical knockout in 2008
- Rafael Nadal's (tennis) victory over Roger Federer at Wimbledon in 2008
- Manchester City (English football) capturing consecutive Premier League titles (2017–18 and 2018–19)
- the American Women's National Soccer team's 2019 World Cup

… and the list can go on. I deliberately introduced this list with a possessive pronoun: "*my* favorite moments of triumph." Fan experience highlights the instability of psychic boundaries, in which individuals attend to agonistic feats waged by others often miles, if not countries, away. At the same time, the draw of sports is in enacting spectators' most intimate concerns. Sports fandom offers psychoanalysis an unrivaled example of how subjectivity is not only rife with contradictions and conflicts but seeks them out.

Among the many reasons professional sports deserves further critical inquiry, its immense reach and influence is where one must begin. The unparalleled contemporary popularity of sports can be measured by people and finances. Estimates of the number of football (soccer) fans hover at over half the global population (FIFA, 2020). Recently, in the United States, 59% of adults in America identified as sports fans (Jones, 2015). The global sports market is estimated to have been worth $488.5 billion in 2018 (Businesswire, 2019). The industry provides profits at various levels, from team owners' corporations who sponsor sports for advertising purposes and the athletes who can stand to earn millions to the media companies that broadcast competitions to merchandise sellers and the casual gambler. Professional sports' social and political functions, however, transcend quantifiability. Spectatorship can provide interpersonal connection and serve as a medium for exemplifying group values, such as resilience, pursuit of excellence, discipline, solidarity and sacrifice. As has been documented, since antiquity the nation-state has used professional and international sporting events (e.g., the World Cup, Olympics) to propagate ideological agendas (Potter, 2012).

Though the exponential growth and position of professional athletics in contemporary society should stagger even the staunch sports fan, its appeal might be best probed by the incredulous – who have never jumped off their feet in celebration of a goal scored or hung their heads as a ball eluded the grasp of the pursuing player. Admittedly, I am a life-long fan, who in college had the ambition to be a sports journalist and in childhood fancifully aspired to be the first Filipino-American NBA player. Having failed in those aspirations and become a psychoanalytic psychologist, I have observed how sports enters my

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

consulting room with children and adults, assisted the National Basketball Players Association's Mental Health and Wellness program and discussed the disavowed aspects that drive sports fandom professionally (Reynoso, 2018). Psychoanalysis teaches us, among many things, to question the specifics of desire. Despite what the passionate fan may want to believe, to enjoy sports is to take part in what the incredulous may find so puzzling, if not poisonous, about it.

For all that is praiseworthy in sports, it has its problems. Some have critically examined sports' more nefarious role in facilitating oppressive ideologies, spreading global predatory capitalism, espousing political conservatism and promoting militarism (Serazio, 2019; Zirin, 2008). There may be many who profit from "the sports industrial complex," with awareness of its exploitative mechanisms. The identifiable rewards can be rationalized to outweigh, if not deny, sports' many potential ills. Requiring further theorization are the unconscious returns fandom provides that far surpass its conventional dividends. In fact, these unconscious satisfactions may not only contradict what one thinks appeals about sports but are inextricable from what many find so problematic.

In it for the losing

Much of sports fandom seemingly centers on the emotions, fantasies and thoughts of accomplishment and victory. However, what the average fan will have to acknowledge, even begrudgingly, is that much of fandom involves tarrying with failure and loss. "My" sports fan achievements that opened this article can easily be accompanied by a *much* longer list of the crushing defeats "I" experienced: the Boston Red Sox comeback victory over the New York Yankees in 2004; the New Jersey Nets' consecutive NBA Finals losses in 2002–3; the Boston Celtics beating the Los Angeles Lakers in the 2008 NBA Finals; Manchester City's continuing Champions League eliminations since 2016; Manny Pacquiao's defeats to Juan Manuel Marquez and Floyd Mayweather . . . and the list goes on. Even after winning, what usually ensues for those in professional sports (and I have been fortunate to consult with a few) and for fans can be characterized in Kleinian paranoid-schizoid terms of fears of catastrophic destruction (Klein, 1946); the anticipation of retaliation by the defeated and countless others; and dread of continuously living in a world of scarcity where resources (e.g., players, coaches, money) are envied, under threat of being taken at all times and must be protected. There is a reason the previous or current winner is described as the "defending champion." Might we then say that one's time as a fan is psychically spent avoiding loss, displacing loss, inflicting loss, minimizing loss, repairing loss and tolerating loss more than anything else?

Despite the previous year's winner, a sporting competition usually begins with a vacancy. In sports, the default position is customarily one of not-having.

Stated basically, any golf tournament, tennis major, track meet or athletic season begins with a champion uncrowned – boxing and other combat sports are the exceptions. For all the language of winning (e.g., "win or go home," "winning isn't everything; it's the only thing") in professional sports, within the desire for victory lurks the drive to reproduce and repeat the evanescence, if not impossibility, of achievement. As fans and many retired athletes will recount, winning does not satisfy permanently but only perpetuates the quest for more. Sports asks what this *more* is about, if we care to listen.

Though many fans will readily state that a championship is more satisfying when it comes after years of disappointment, fewer, but some, will also confess that the more intense affective (albeit masochistic) experience is attached to rooting for the "underdog" team or athlete chasing the elusive title. Not only when the rival team succeeds and shatters our fantasy for mastery, but even when our favored athlete is triumphant and exposes the gap of vicarious relation, fans dwell in incompleteness. When I celebrate Serena Williams' dominance on the tennis court, I am confronted ultimately and traumatically with who I am not, what I do not have and what I cannot do. Though winning provides pleasure for both athletes and their fans, it may only represent a brief interruption of our unconscious repetitive course of "enjoying what we don't have" (McGowan, 2013).

Lacan (1964–5/2004) states that psychoanalysis "is engaged in the central lack in which the subject experiences himself as desire" (p. 265). I would claim that professional athletic fandom is a wide showcase for this foundational absence. Should we then not try to think sports psychoanalytically or psychoanalysis sportively? Applying the Lacanian cultural analysis of thinkers like Todd McGowan (2013, 2016, 2019) and Mari Ruti (2012, 2018), it might be said that sports fandom provides the most available system for individuals and groups to enjoy their lack while consciously pursuing pleasure. The constitutive lack from which subjectivity develops situates us in the world as desiring beings, whose mode of enjoyment (*jouissance*) shows traces of our relationship to something that is unrepresentable but deeply personal. The enjoyment and suffering of our *jouissance* is oriented around the Thing (das Ding); as Lacan (1959–60/1992) says: "It is as a function of this beyond-of-the-signified and of an emotional relationship to it that the subject keeps its distance" (p. 52). As Ruti (2012) elaborates, the Thing "functions as a melancholy object of loss that can never be recovered for the simple reason that it was never (in reality) lost in the first place" (p. 17). We metaphorically and metonymically attach to objects of desire that can only aim to serve as mundane substitutes retroactively conceived in a passionate yet futile attempt to recapture this "lost" object.

One can take pleasure in momentarily "earning" the object of desire, signified in sports by the Olympic gold medal, Masters green jacket, Stanley Cup or any other trophy. Soon after, for both fan and athlete, however, the victory will

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

reveal the ultimate limit of this conscious pursuit as the hunt for the object cause of desire (*objet a*) continues. As Lacan (1964–5/2004) says, "This a is presented precisely, in the field of the mirage of the narcissistic function of desire, as the object that cannot be swallowed, as it were, which remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier. It is at this point of lack that the subject has to recognize himself" (p. 270). Professional sports and its fandom stages how this strange recognition unfolds into repetitive acts of self-subversion. Since the object must remain lost in order for us to enjoy, our heightened investment in our own disappointment "causes individuals to act against their own self-interest and against the interests of the society as a whole" (McGowan, 2014, p. 13).

The surplus of the sports fan

Thinking professional sports psychoanalytically can elucidate how its appeal seizes on the way psychic enjoyment is organized through absence and excess. Imagine the incredulous perspective of someone who does not identify as a sports fan walking past a restaurant or bar showing a televised sporting event of some significance. Witnessing the frequent paroxysms of those watching the proceedings, the person may wonder: Why do they care so much if they're not actually playing? That team won, not these people … why are they so happy? And why are some of them so sad, since there's another match tomorrow? Why are they acting like this game has any consequence to their lives? What may seem downright peculiar to the disbeliever – this term may be especially apt since so much of sports fandom feels like it is based on faith and belief – is that the fervidness of the sports fan is produced in an irreducible gap. He or she is not actually playing, winning or losing; and very rarely knows personally the athlete(s) whom countless hours are spent watching, thinking and reading about. As this hypothetical scenario depicts, the incredulous perspective sees the passion of the sports fan as an alienated one that overflows into a distant space.

The fan's excessive desire depends on the absence – "the inaugural division" (Lacan, 1964–5/2004, p. 270) – on which subjectivity is founded and that is accommodated by the basic emptiness of sports. Relationships to athletes, or those I have previously called celebrity objects (Reynoso, 2013, 2016b), demonstrate the structuring of relational affection based on an absence and excess. The attachment cannot be articulated beyond a fan's excited recitation of numerous qualities, skills or statistics that amount to nothing more than a generic list. What Lacan (1964–5/2004) says the analysand speaks in relation to the analyst is displayed in the secondary attachments to celebrities, including professional athletes: "I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the objet petit a – I mutilate you" (p. 269). The misplaced alienation tempts and tortures. The inability to possess or preserve the *jouissance* of the athlete can enrage and obsess.

Attempts to fasten connection to a player in the symbolic, as associated to the team one roots for, ultimately reduces to the fan's unnamable surplus endowment to a team based in the circumstantial (e.g., where one was born, family fan lineage, team success). In sports, which was once described as "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits, 1978, p. 55), points, scores, time and other metrics are used to define the arbitrary limits of a contest. Sports' capacity to engage so many has to do with its vacuous capaciousness. A team's victory can mean the world to so many ("sports as a metaphor for life") precisely because it at the same time means nothing ("it's just a game"). Sports is not popular for one reason but for many. Its openness, formalized in the gap between athlete and fan, allows the individual, group and society to inject into sports what they will, including fantasies of re-finding "das Ding" and encountering the surplus of the real.

The passion of sports spectatorship involves the tension of perceived limits being crossed or overcome and its accompanying fantasies. Not only the incredulous but sports fans themselves know that everything about following a team or athlete is too much. The wins feel too good; the losses hurt too much; reading about and watching sports takes too much time; attending the competitions and buying merchandise at the events costs too much; there's too much time spent thinking about the athletes and strategizing about the upcoming games, which we love too much; and we feel closer to other fans (strangers) than we should. It is also through sport spectatorship that we allow ourselves to eat too much food, drink too much alcohol, want to destroy the opponent too much, forget too much, rage too much when our athlete(s) disappoint us, waste too much, aggress too much against other fans, feel superior too much, degrade too much, exclude too much and hate too much. The sports fan wants an escape into impersonal excess that comes with self-destructively shedding their symbolic identity for the imaginary identification with the group (anonymity) but at the same time seeks an unbearable unmediated experience with the real as singular to oneself (Ruti, 2012).

The figure of the sports fan can help us theorize the individual subject as inextricably singular and social. At every turn, the sports fan is confronted by the other: athletes one cheers for and against; fans of one's team and of rivals; and incredulous non-fans. The envy of the other gets activated by transgressive fantasies of their unlimited *jouissance*, our paranoia about their conquering of lack and, often in racialized and sexist terms, the theft of our enjoyment (Hook, 2018). The desire to punish the other (team, fans) may reflect a wish to locate our own fundamental lack outside ourselves to make them bear the constitutive sacrifice of our subjectivity, as well as an unconscious enjoyment of subverting, transgressing or contradicting our own ethics. As Ruti (2012) points out, though, the Other "protects us from the disillusioning realization that *jouissance* is antithetical to subjectivity not so much because we have been unfairly deprived of it, but because we are inherently incapable of managing it" (p. 20).

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

The enjoyment of self-betrayal

The athlete is generally related to as a figure of excess but, like all of us, is one of lack as well. The fan's splitting of the athlete demonstrates the fantasy of enjoying excess and lack as separate, instead of seeing them bound together as conditions of the possibility of the other (McGowan, 2017). Simplifying sports and the problems it confronts us with helps those who wish to exploit others through it by avoiding and betraying the traumatic quality of our desiring subjectivity. In sports, as in life, we desire what we want in immediate abundance but simultaneously never wish to reach that surplus of painful pleasure of unmediated *jouissance*. Thus, we invest in the dichotomized appearance of sports or let ourselves be fooled into this lazy assemblage in order to enjoy the fantasy of transgressing limits that we repeatedly both set up to fail and actively keep moving beyond our reach. We unconsciously enjoy this position we attribute to lacking in order to preserve the potential future of excess that we hope and work to never attain. I have explored this theme using Bion's (1961) pairing assumption to discuss the con/destruction of Tiger Woods as celebrity object for the group fantasies of a "post-racial" America (Reynoso, 2016a).

The focus on all that athletes have in excess (e.g., talent, physical skills, money, popularity) only gains relevance in comparison to what we lack, distracting us from our central concern with our ontological trauma of lack in being. It might also be said that this distraction is only conscious and that unconsciously it is the risk of an encounter with this trauma that we seek. The spectator enjoys the passive giving themself over to the event of sports and its potential to traumatize (cf. Farred, 2014). This can occur whenever they are confronted with the unexpected. The surprise is mainly evidenced within the context of a competition's narrative being upended – the U.S. Hockey team besting the favored Soviet Union in the 1980 Olympics, Buster Douglas's win over then undefeated heavyweight champion Mike Tyson in 1990 and Leicester City overcoming incredible odds to win the English Premier League in 2016 are just a few that come to mind. If we submit to the theater of sports, our experience of being shocked at the upset of the overwhelmingly favored team or athlete ruptures a symbolic narrative that actualizes an encounter with our self-division. The frenzy of the fan is a submission to the possibility of our ever-present enjoyment of self-betrayal.

This is why the notion of sports being an escape is misleading. To say that sports offers an escape is to fail to ask the more complicated questions of what one is escaping from and into. Many have observed how the attempt to position sports as apolitical betrays its political uses (Serazio, 2019; Zirin, 2008). Not only is it impossible to be outside of the political, but those who criticize athletes for speaking beyond sports are usually arguing against specific beliefs being

spoken about. The illusion of sports being apolitical protects the politics dominant in various sporting cultures. These politics, however defined, are what one submerges oneself in when consuming sports while being able to claim an escape outside of the political. Sports fandom demonstrates how those who consciously seek flight from the reality of the world and its politics betray themselves in the ways supporting a favorite team delivers individuals into the politics of the world just the same. Psychoanalytically, though, we can say that in their contradictory behavior, the subject reveals the central drive toward a subversion of its own desires and its attendant enjoyment.

In particular, to reckon with sports' economic, political and social dimensions, we must elaborate the linkages between its excess and lack in the context of its treatment of the other. To take up an obvious example, the fact that professional sports is overpopulated by men in almost every position from management down to fans points to the active exclusion of women. I have theorized some of the psychic mechanisms at play in the suppression of women in sports as expressive of a masculine position defining itself by excess while riddled by its own lack and fantasies of the surplus enjoyment of women (Reynoso, 2019). I support further movements toward greater inclusion in sports, as in the pay equity case of the national women's soccer team's legal battle against United States Soccer (Das, 2020). I claim, though, that the limit potentially overcome in the case of increased participation and inclusion of women in sports would again reveal (if we wished to see) where other scarcities are permitted. In the specific case of the USWNT fight for equal treatment with the USMNT, it could be the over-representation of white women in U.S. soccer or the oppression of women in other professional sporting cultures whose conditions are far worse. We can look historically to the ways in which the progressive integration of African-American players into American baseball, while influential in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, in contrast also highlighted the wider inequities in the United States for populations of color and depended on the idea of exceptionality required for inclusion and equality (i.e., the racism of exceptional negro motif). Increased inclusion always raises the questions of who are still left out and why.

Sports fandom provides an opportunity to see more generally how unconscious enjoyment is structured in contradiction with our conscious desire. For both the incredulous and the enthusiastic, to consider sports in its totality is to confront omnipresent conflict. How can one obsessively cheer for and feel so attached to a certain player and at the same time be indifferent to the psychological and physical costs of an elite athletic career? The paramount example is the overwhelming popularity of American football, notwithstanding the mounting evidence for the long-term brain injury to which it subjects its players. How can one root for this player or team that is owned by an individual who holds and expresses beliefs one radically opposes? Especially in this media-saturated age of instantly transmitted photography and video, one need not wait

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

too long before being eventually arrested by a clip of a preferred athlete posing with a dictator, disrespecting a symbol one treats with unquestioned reverence or doubting the shape of the earth. How can one praise competition in sports for showcasing values of fairness and solidarity when professional leagues and their governing bodies can justifiably be criticized for corruption and exclusion? How can one reconcile how sports generally tends toward the conservative, regressive and nostalgic (think baseball's pastoral theme, golf's country clubs and Wimbledon's whites) while at the same time being the site of activism, protest and progressive change (think recently of Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe)?

The enjoyment of the fan is based on the unconscious sacrifice sports stages in all its forms. Every pleasure taken in a championship won, a medal claimed or trophy lifted is undergirded by the unconscious investment in all that remains missing. Sports provides individuals with fantasies of wholeness and a future time of plentitude, though what is always returned to is our constitutive state of limit and lack. Efforts to make sports more inclusive and fairer must continue but without illusions of overcoming the ultimate unconscious satisfaction derived from disappointment, disruption and our own undoing. Attempts that endeavor to symbolically resolve divisions and completely solve the problems of sports misunderstand what makes professional athletics so appealing. The contradictions we find in fandom reflect the unmatched unconscious enjoyment we derive from all the domination, exclusion and inequity of sports. We may desire to have a more just sports, but we must contemplate how we also take satisfaction and participate in maintaining its injustice. The seeming irresolvability of this situation is not isolated to sports, but professional sports may present it most openly if we dare to see it. If sports has emancipatory capacities, it may be in learning from the irresolvable contradiction within each question with which fandom confronts us (McGowan, 2019).

The ethical fan?

Sports fandom queries our willful blindness to such things as power relationships. For example, professional athletics can serve predatory capitalistic exploitation and neoliberal indoctrination in mobilizing fantasies of fulfillment of accomplishment and accumulation that succeed in the never-ending, self-defeating extension of this pursuit. From little league (baseball) to Grand Prix (auto racing), organized group sports repetitively reveals the terms by which the few take, secure and exercise power over the acquiescing many. The hyper-commodification of the athletic body in contemporary professional sports, which sees team owners buying, selling and trading humans as commodities, has extended to fans' mimicry of this practice in the business of Internet fantasy sports leagues. With pro sports pulling disproportionately from populations of

color and economic disadvantage in the United States, wouldn't Afropessimism (Wilderson, 2020) rightly situate fandom as always already supporting subjugation?

Though many use sports to dominate or identify with mastery, do we not at the same time have to wonder why there are so many long-suffering fans of teams that not only perpetually underachieve but realistically have little chance of success in the intermediate term? Through sports, we may be able to map how we accept and perpetuate inherited power arrangements and at times glimpse the possible rupture of these static forms. The 2020 protests by the WNBA and NBA players for black life resulted in the cancelation of playoff games. This is an example of athletes momentarily claiming power within a system by which they are otherwise subsumed (cf. Rhoden, 2006). How we understand the choice athletes have in participating in systems that oppress them requires further thought, as, among other matters, we must consider the young age and conditions under which they are recruited and pushed onto the monetized conveyor belt of elite sports (Reynoso, 2016a).

Despite the fact that we may begin a fandom (especially as children) that has a pre-existing and often binarized – particularly in regard to gender – assemblage, through sports we may be able to ask about the kind of freedom we possess, however limited, in how we respect, participate in or even see such parameters situationally or stably. For example, the absence of trans athletes in professional athletics is not reflective of sports' natural state but a result of who has been barred from our line of sight. Sports offers us ways of inquiring about our conjoined investment in seeing and not seeing, dominating and being dominated. What remains an open question is what can interrupt one's field of vision or position within a power structure.

An ethical sports fandom may be a self-contradictory notion that is nonetheless useful in helping us think through the way desire can be lived. If there remains a possibility to actualize ethical sports fandom, and the reality of this may be aspirational, perhaps it is not in the performance of prescribed actions and behaviors. This is similar to the way that we should be suspicious of ideas about being a "real" sports fan. Female-identified sports writers and scholars, such as Stacey May Fowles (2017), Erin Tarver (2017), Jessica Luther and Kavitha Davidson (2020), have described how the traditional discourse of being a "true" sports fan of any team or player marginalizes women and has historically served to more broadly exercise control and domination in the creation and maintenance of groups that exclude, degrade and often abuse. There may not be a more egregious example than the treatment of individuals whose sexuality and/or gender identification are used explicitly and implicitly as the negative to define athletic ideals and rules for participation.

Despite their apparent differences, both psychoanalysis and sports encourage interest in how one achieves a result and its implications, more than the outcome itself. How we individually and collectively are sports fans (and how

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

the incredulous are not) highlights the problematics of desire that are uniquely navigated, regardless of apparent similarities in paths or differences in results. Fowles (2017) describes being a female fan who finds a kind of salvation in following the Toronto Blue Jays while struggling with the misogyny, commercialism and cruelty of baseball culture. Fowles' account reads differently than Luther and Davidson's (2020) more wide-ranging consideration of sports' ugliness and their prescriptions for a more egalitarian world of professional athletics, though both books are more similar than some other accounts (cf. Almond, 2014) that espouse the abandonment of sports fandom as the ethical path.

Perhaps, akin to Fowles (2017), an ethical fandom can be lived less in revolutionary actions that try to transform sports but instead in the continuous private examination of being a fan. This may lead to becoming an actively more ambivalent or contradictory fan as an end in itself: one who accepts that professional athletics is both inherently devoid of meaning and bursts forth full of what we endow it with; who acknowledges that what we decry about sports is what draws us in; who realizes that the chase for sports excellence provides more satisfaction in tarrying with impossible deficiency and avoiding the trauma that perfection begets; who appreciates how sports' excessive abundance can help direct us to see its coincidence with scarcity more clearly; who recognizes that the activity of displacing sacrifice and loss onto the other that abounds in sports makes us commune with our inescapable limits more than master them; who understands that around almost every turn, sports will disappoint and subvert all the ideals one sets for it; and who recognizes that professional sports shows us how the real functions in everyday life but through a setting assigned to escapist fantasy.

To paraphrase the astute comment of a reviewer of this paper, we cannot be certain how much of a conscious agentic choice it can be to become an ethical sports fan. Following a Lacanian account of ethics that has us consider the extent to which we have given ground relative to our desire (Lacan, 1959–60/1992, p. 319), we must admit that striving for a more socially responsible fandom may seek to please/conform to the Other but betray our desires in doing so. Conversely, may we pursue our fandom in excessive ways but in fidelity to our desire in ways that damage some of our existing relationships? For those of us who want to imagine a world structured by less brutal forms of domination and oppression (Allen, 2016), professional athletics characterizes that what is required is a probing of naive ideals that enclose the hidden excessive enjoyments taken in utopia's (and fandom's) vices.

As I discussed earlier, programs that too simply redress injustices risk obscuring how they continue to operate, moving their location and contributing to them. For instance, I believe we should seek to increase opportunities afforded queer athletes in a way that can change the material conditions for queer individuals in athletics and beyond. In doing so, though, we will need to

persist in tracing our motivations and methods to address particular forms of inequality in certain settings and not others. It would also be wise to appreciate the costs of inclusion and for whom, remembering Slavoj Žižek's (2018) caution that "when a group is under pressure to 'integrate' into a wider community, it often resists out of fear that it will lose its mode of jouissance" (p. 65). We must grasp the state of what the marginalized are being invited into and the "unexpected" implications of doing so (cf. Puar's (2007) homonationalism). In the pursuit of one conscious goal (social justice-related or otherwise) we would not want to conceal what and who we are willing to sacrifice and what we are asking others to sacrifice.

Being a sports fan provides a setting for people to play in the fantasy of being less/more themselves (think of the attire worn by fans) but closer to a truth of their desires. Despite calls for fairness in professional sports, we may have to acknowledge that we unconsciously want more than our share, as realized in our affective response with getting what we expected or less. Even when a team is favored over another competitor, does one actually deserve to win more than the other – or isn't it more a matter of expectation or wish? In sports fandom, we may act in accordance with our desires more directly than in other areas of life because we allow ourselves to believe that we are suspending reality, as opposed to encountering the real. The intensity of upset expectations out on the court or field reflects the draw of the possible meeting with what is beyond the limits we use to define ourselves – for better or worse. A submission to the potential of sports would then have to allow this lure to lead wherever in us that it does. For instance, when a boxer dies in the ring or from injuries sustained in a fight, sports interrogates the shock and horror this engenders from spectators – is this not what you wanted? I claim that we cannot say no so unequivocally.

One attraction of both sports and film, though we may try to distance ourselves from it, is the occasion to jolt us into ourselves through their capacities to surprise and disappoint if we submit ourselves to this possibility. What is at risk is both the specific excess we might face in ourselves and the traumatic aspects of this activity itself. Sports, like film, might confront us with an encounter with the Lacanian real that is offered to us as a fiction and thus can share a filmic function that provides

> an opportunity to recognize our own involvement and investment in what we are seeing. The point of this recognition is not that we might actually attain the neutrality that excessive enjoyment disturbs, but that we might genuinely take up and publicly avow this excess. In doing so, we strip the excess of its power to quietly supplement the functioning of ideology. (McGowan, 2007, p. 55)

Elsewhere, McGowan (2014) theorizes that "Once publicly avowed, this enjoyment can no longer function as support for racist or paranoid violence"

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

(pp. 54–5). How this recognition and public avowal can be actualized and what it can lead to are open questions sports asks of us beyond our role as a fan/non-fan. Further, what this kind of recognition emerges from, for either those involved sports or the fan, is uncertain. What allows certain sportive occurrences and not others to reach the status of an "event" (Badiou, 2005) deserves further investigation that would extend Grant Farred's (2014) scholarship.

Still, we might turn to McGowan's (2007) theorization of comedy for what is a common feature of this athletic reckoning, insofar as

> comedy reveals that lack and excess can coincide and that this coincidence, though it isn't visible in everyday existence, is constitutive of our subjectivity. In this sense, subjectivity itself is inherently comic, but subjects plunge themselves into everyday life and its separation of lack and excess in order to avoid confronting their traumatic intersection. Comedy returns us to the trauma of our subjectivity. (p. 15)

Though professional sports often appears extremely polarized and dichotomous, we have to understand that this does not reflect its latent structure. Sports, like comedy, can actualize the coincidence of excess and lack, as long as individuals make efforts to grasp and maintain it. It is there when athletes temporarily shed their sportive roles to embody their particular experience of the universality of lack within the social bond. This can take the form of a playfully quizzical facial expression an athlete makes in momentary shock at her or his own ability, as if to say, "huh, I didn't know I had that in me." Fans can also glimpse this in the genuine exhausted embrace of two boxers after the final bell, the immediate identificatory concern a football player shows after his tackle injures an opponent or the apologetic humility of a basketball, soccer or tennis player after embarrassing an opponent with a devastating shot.

McGowan (2017) writes that "an excessive response to lack or the emergence of lack occasioned by excess reveals how every lack is excessive and every excess is lacking" (p. 13). When sports houses social change, this involves individuals acting as more than "just" athletes. In the protests of those like Muhammad Ali and Ada Hegerberg, we find figures who actively performed excessive acts of sacrifice to bring attention to disproportionate loss being conferred on others. Ali's conscientious objection on religious grounds to being drafted into America's war in Vietnam cost him the World Heavyweight title and three years of his boxing career. More recently, the Norwegian footballer Ada Hegerberg, then considered the world's best female player, sat out the 2019 World Cup to bring attention to the unequal treatment of the men and women's teams in Norway and beyond. Their acts of surplus absence made visible the extremity of aggression that visits loss disproportionately on people of color and on women and how all lack depends on excess and vice versa.

My overall aim in this paper was to add to a small literature thinking sports and psychoanalysis together to demonstrate the worthwhile prospects of further investigations. I hope I have left the reader with more questions and problems than answers and solutions. As in the case of programs to address the inequities in sports, even if solutions improve certain conditions, sports' problems, which are our problems, must be allowed to remain bare. Rather than using psychoanalytic ideas to explain sports, professional sports may pose questions for psychoanalysis about the matters with which it concerns itself. Psychoanalysis and sports can push toward this kind of opening and fluidity while always remaining in tension with the static and fixed.

The retired boxing commentator Larry Merchant once said, "nothing will kill boxing, and nothing can save it" (Raskin, 2018). This is one example of sports phrasing the confounding way our desire is driven by a repetition that maintains itself in an unconscious enjoyment of excess and lack. Sports fans and the incredulous must come to understand that though they position themselves differently, both are subject to the way enjoyment circuitously winds itself around the borders of excess and lack. We must remember that the sports fan inside the bar also looks back strangely at the passerby who seems immune to the thrills of the game, while the fan may wonder with suspicion what moves the non-fan (if not sports) or place them as a figure of pure lack to anchor their excess. Sports is built on the social bond, despite, or perhaps as depicted in, the division and violence it expresses. Thus, it offers an opportunity to conceive divergent ways of seeing oneself with others in and beyond the athletic competition – perhaps in our share of universal lack, whatever our roles are in distributing it particularly and unevenly in society.

One may have detected the regional enmity exhibited in my list of winning moments that also informs the title of this paper. During my time as a sports fan growing up in New Jersey and the New York metropolitan area, most teams representing Boston or Massachusetts were natural adversaries. Though I did not consciously understand it then, my hatred of all things Boston sports (Celtics, Red Sox, Patriots) was, among other things, probably an attempt to displace my lack. As a fan now in his forties, I still may find myself jeering "Boston sucks" watching a sports event, whether or not a Boston team is playing – again, the excessive conduct of a fan. I understand that there is no permanent way to avoid lack, and in fact my enjoyment as a sports fan rests on my inability to obtain satisfaction. So, while I still may believe as a sports fan that Boston sucks, I know that I do as well. Nothing can kill or save sports, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

  1088-0763 **Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society** Vol. 26, 4, 591–607

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