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THE ETHICS OF COMPETITION AND ITS RELATION TO SOME MORAL PROBLEMS IN ATHLETICS *

by

James Keating

Suppose a person was just beginning an investigation of the subject of competition and he turned to the general catalogue of a large library. What could we safely assume would be his first impression? The chances are overwhelming that he would conclude that "competition" is primarily an economic term and that practically all of its serious investigation has been carried on by economists. Other scholars have, in fact, examined the term but, from the viewpoint of a card catalogue, they appear as rare exceptions.

An investigation, however, soon reveals that we live in a society where other types of competition are almost daily in evidence, obvious in so many different ways. Our political system with its electoral process frequently supplies examples of the most intense competition. Few of us can think of more appropriate alternatives for determining our leaders than our present form of free elections with all of its short-comings? Our legal system with its advocacy system of law is clearly competitive in many of its aspects and, while it is far from ideal, there has been no mass movement to replace it by another. Even our method of choosing a mate has strong competitive elements whereby prospective suitors often vie with others, similarly motivated, for the attention, affection or marriage of some third person. So natural does this type of competition appear to us that we can hardly conceive of workable alternative methods of selection. Yet for centuries courtship and marriage have been arranged in infancy by parents in Asia and with a high degree of apparent success.

Thus we can see that in addition to the economic sphere, competition is an important ingredient in our political system, our legal system, our method of courtship and in many other aspects of our daily life, but most of all in athletics.

I have been asked to speak on the ethics of competition, particularly as it relates to problems in athletics. Such a request affords me the opportunity to discuss in some detail the meaning and implications of competition and, at the same time, to propagate my views on the nature of athletics.

Competition can be stimulating and challenging but when one's rivals are inventive and persistent, it usually involves detailed preparation, great effort and often disappointment and defeat. As a result many compete primarily out of necessity rather than from desire. For instance, powerful economic competitors, at times, may reach a point where they yearn for the peace and serenity of monopoly. As a result they secretly and deviously enter into practices which are condemned as price-fixing or other types of restraint of free trade. Lawyers,

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likewise, often see a court case as unnecessarily wasteful and thus seek out-of-court settlements which they believe will better serve the cause of justice and pocketbooks of all concerned. In politics it is invariably the unknown or the underdog who cries for direct confrontations in the forum while the confident leader or incumbent seldom, if ever, is willing to debate the issues publicly. Even in our system of courtships, the contending suitors are often reluctant competitors and many deny that they would stoop so low as to compete for the affections of another. Some of the faint-hearted reluctantly choose solitude and loneliness rather than face the humiliation which a possible rejection magnifies in their minds.

In everyday life men and women are often forced to compete, but in athletics they do so voluntarily and freely. Competition is an essential ingredient in athletics, never to be evaded by some alternative course of action. Both competitors normally look forward to and savor the contest. Insofar as it is properly conducted, excellence is crowned by victory and the crestfallen loser dreams of and prepares for another tomorrow.

*Competition Defined*

Definition is always difficult. Seeking a definition, which will not only be applicable in economics but to all other areas of human life as well, is a most difficult undertaking. Consider, however, the remarkable similarity to be found in the definitions of competition offered by outstanding scholars in three different intellectual disciplines. John B. Clark, a noted economist has defined competition in this manner: "Actual competition consists invariably in an effort to undersell a rival producer."¹ In a somewhat broader anthropological context, Margaret Mead seems satisfied with the definition that "Competition is the act of seeking or endeavoring to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time."² Arthur O. Lovejoy, Professor of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins, did an even more thorough job. Lovejoy characterized competition as "... as an attempt to get or to keep any valuable thing either to the exclusion of others or in greater measure than others."³ Notice that in each of the three definitions there is a rival and an attempt to excel or overcome this rival. The only improvement we can make in Lovejoy's excellent analysis of competition is to add a brief qualifying phrase removing competition from the sphere of unbridled or criminal conflict. If we add to Lovejoy's definition the qualifying phrase, "Competition is an attempt (according to agreed-upon rules) to get or to keep any valuable thing either to the exclusion of others or in greater measure than others" we quite properly exclude from the sphere of competition, criminal activities such as burglary, embezzlement, strong-armed robbery and the like.

It is both interesting and important to observe that each of the three definitions considered, if accepted, prevents a common misconception from occurring. Many people commonly speak of competing against themselves. But
a proper understanding of the nature of competition makes this impossible. This common misconception is often verbalized in this manner. "When I participate in tennis or golf, my primary objective is to improve upon my own past performance. Victory over my fellow participants is of little or no importance to me." If this is actually the case, and it may very well be, then the person voicing such sentiments is not actually competing. There are far more precise and accurate ways to describe his efforts. He is attempting to improve his skill, to learn, to develop, to grow, to actualize his potentialities. Only when he seeks to exceed, surpass, or go beyond the best efforts of others is he actually competing. Competition in all of its forms always presupposes an other or others.

If the term competition is used promiscuously in everyday conversation to characterize everything from types of conflict to general processes of growth and development, we are neither surprised or shocked by the ambiguity. This is par for the verbal course. Many commonly used terms like "sport" have no more specificity. When, however an internationally known scholar in an important book fails to be more precise, we can be understandably disturbed. Georg Simmel, a highly regarded social theorist has devoted the second chapter of an important work exclusively to the subject of competition and his investigation of this subject matter is disturbing. Simmel raises serious questions and doubts when he states that the foremost sociological characteristic of competition is that the "conflict in it is indirect." Linguistic usage, he informs us, reserves the term "competition" for conflicts which consist in parallel efforts by both parties concerning the same prize. While this position confirms our earlier contention that competition always involves an other or others, his insistence that it consists in parallel efforts by both parties would seem to almost rule out direct competition and to reinforce his contention that the foremost, sociological characteristic of competition is that the "conflict in it is indirect."

He discusses two types of competition. In the first type, he tells us, where victory is the chronologically first necessity, in itself it (victory) means nothing. The goal of the whole action is attained only with the availability of a value, which does not depend on the competitive fight at all." Presumably the following would be a practical example of what Simmel had in mind. If I challenged several of you to a race and offered $100 to the winner, victory would be the chronologically first necessity and the $100 prize would be the goal of the competitors and its value would in no way be dependent upon the competitive fight.

It is the second type of competition in which Simmel is most interested and which he believes to be of greater sociological value. "In the second type of competition, the struggle consists only in the fact that each competitor by himself aims at the goal without using his strength on the adversary . . . This type of competition equals all other kinds of conflict in emotional and passionate effort. Yet from a superficial standpoint it proceeds as if there existed no
adversary but only the aim."\textsuperscript{5} Simmel gives us three examples of this type of competition in which the competitor proceeds without using his strength on the adversary; indeed as if no adversary even existed. Simmel contends that we find such ideal indirect competition in the case of the religious proselytizer, who only by his zeal and sincere conviction, in the businessman who only by his attractive price, quality merchandise and good service, and in the runner who only by his swiftness, wins the victory. Such competition does, in fact, exist and may provide the greatest social value.

Simmel's failure to treat of direct competition, however, clearly detracts from his study and raises serious questions concerning the depth of his understanding. Most competition does not consist in "parallel efforts" of the competitors. The competition in economics, law, politics is often of a most direct kind. In athletics it is only occasionally indirect. Even in the example which Simmel cites of the runner, the competition is usually far more direct than he believes. Only in the short dashes can it be said that "each competitor by himself aims at the goal without using his strength on the adversary... and that he proceeds as if there existed no adversary..." In all middle distance and distance races the competitors are keenly aware of the existence of their competitors and usually, by the employment of their strength and speed, attempt to get their opponent to run the type of race for which he is least qualified.

Consider other athletic contests such as baseball, basketball, football, hockey, boxing, wrestling, tennis, etc. and we begin to question whether Simmel's treatment of competition is adequate or only highly esoteric.

While it is only conjecture, it would seem that Simmel's unexpressed attitude toward direct competition is best summarized by the psychoanalyst Ernest Van Den Haag: "Direct competition is illustrated by games like baseball or football. Each team tries not only to maximize its own score, but also to hold to a minimum the score of the opposing team. Each team attempts to reduce the achievement of the other by directly interfering with it. There is only a relative standard of achievement and no objective, independent one, such as time in a race, or total crop harvested. The extent of the defeat of one team is the measure of the achievement, the victory, of the other team. This is true also of boxing or chess matches. Achievement consists mainly in defeating the opponent, more than in attaining a goal in itself worthwhile."\textsuperscript{6}

Van Den Haag does, however, acknowledge certain values in direct competition. "The psychological usefulness of competitive games lies both in cultivating and in absorbing some of our competitive spirit, channeling the need for superiority feeling into harmless outlets, and above all, in training us to pursue our aims according to rules that limit the harm we do to each other."\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{The Case Against Competition}

In \textit{The Greening of America}, Charles Reich considers the effects of competition upon the American character during the various stages of its historical
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development and in each case finds it wanting. "... There was another side to the American character—the harsh side of self-interest, competitiveness, suspicion of others. Each individual would go it alone, refusing to trust his neighbors, seeing another man's advantage as his loss, seeing the world as a rat race with no rewards to losers. Underlying this attitude was the assumption that 'human nature' is fundamentally bad, and that a struggle against his fellow men is man's natural condition. 'There'll always be aggression and a struggle for power, and there'll always be a pecking order,' says Consciousness I. In Consciousness II, that created by the Corporate State, the same outlook prevails: Behind a facade of optimism, Consciousness II has a profoundly pessimistic view of man. It sees man in Hobbesian terms; human beings are by nature aggressive, competitive, power-seeking; uncivilized man is a jungle beast. Consciouness III, not yet fully achieved, "is seeking to replace the infantile and destructive self-seeking that we laud as 'competition' by a new capacity for working and living together." "

One does not have to indulge in the romantic meanderings of Reich in order to experience qualms concerning a competitive view of life. Can such a view be reconciled with the Golden Rule, can the spirit of profit and success be held simultaneously with the spirit of service? Is not self-interest directly opposed to self-sacrifice? Such apprehension is obviously not without some foundation when we are told bluntly by one of America's great economists, Frank K. Knight that: "It is in terms of power then, if at all, that competitive economics and the competitive view of life for which it must be largely accountable are to be justified. Whether we are to regard them as justified at all depends upon whether we are willing to accept an ethics of power as the basis of our world view..." "

Knight comes to this emphatic conclusion in a book entitled The Ethics of Competition, a book in which he raises a number of important questions. He inquires: "Is emulation as a motive ethically good or base? Is success in any sort of contest, as such, a noble objective?" Ashley Montagu, an anthropologist from Princeton, has a ready answer: "The first point I would make is that unless he is a gambler, no one should ever play any game in order to win. No one should ever participate in any sport in order to win. I have no doubt that this will be a startling statement to many, but I do not make it in order to startle anyone. I make it as a sober statement calculated from the beginning of the discussion of the meaning and purpose of games to indicate what is wrong with the attitude with which Americans enter into the playing of any game." If character development is related to ethics, Montagu attempts to justify this position in the concluding paragraph of the same chapter. "As Americans we must make up our minds as to the kind of character we would like our citizens to have and to do what is indicated to bring those characters into being, to recognize that a most important preparation for the game of life is the training one receives in playing the game in childhood and youth. We need to realize that the present
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training we give our children through competitive games tends to bring out the worst rather than the best in them . . . The old adage will always remain true: 'It's not who wins that matters but how you play the game.'

Competition and Ethics

1) The Ethical Neutrality of Competition Considered In Itself

Competition in and of itself is neither a virtue nor a vice. It can only be ethically evaluated in a concrete situation. Professor Knight errs grievously when he maintains that it can only be justified if we accept an ethics of power as the basis of our world view. Ashley Montagu reveals an abysmal ignorance of athletics when he argues that we should never strive to win, that winning is not important. Competition provides a selective mechanism for assigning position, place, power, productive ability or physical excellence and until its detractors can offer an alternative mechanism that is practical and workable they can only be said to be over-reacting emotionally to many of the evils that do, in fact, follow in the wake of intense competition.

Consider a common, practical example. Ten students are applying for admission to one of our prestigious medical schools. The entire gamut of relevant personal qualifications of each candidate is carefully considered by a screening committee and finally one is selected. Few, if any, of the candidates may be aware of the meticulous efforts of the selection committee to choose the best possible candidate. Yet the very desire of each respective candidate to enter that medical school made him a competitor and while he may not have been aware of the extreme competitive nature of the selective process, this fact of life will eventually become clear to him.

The same difficult question as to how a fair selection is to be made faces those who aspire to political office, or of lawyers who daily seek to win the approval of judge and jury, or, on the social level, of those who seek to win the affection of some popular and attractive member of the opposite sex. What alternative to the competitive principle would those who denigrate it offer in the equitable resolution of such problems?

There are few alternatives to competition as a social determinant of position, power or excellence. Historically the chief alternative has probably been some form of status, usually a rule of inheritance. Political preferment has also, at times, been employed but usually found sadly wanting. The chief danger to such methods of selection is that of suppression of personal development. Without a powerful stimulant such as competition human potentialities remain as such, potentialities which will never be actualized.

Despite his stinging criticism of its ethical qualities, Frank Knight seems to concede that the competitive system in economics has produced an abundance of material goods at reasonable prices. Yet if this is so, we find ourselves confronted with the curious paradox that the material welfare of this world is at
war with essential morality. Rather than argue for cooperation as a workable alternative to achieve the greatest material advantage, Knight appeals to cooperation on other grounds. He argues that happiness, self-realization and personal fulfillment, all basic goals of prominent ethical systems, depend less on material satisfaction than on spiritual resourcefulness and a joyous appreciation of the spiritual things of life, especially the affection for one's fellow creatures. "A strong argument for cooperation, if it would work, would be its tendency to teach people to like each other in a more positive sense than can ever be bred by participation in a contest—certainly in a contest in which the means of life, or of a decent life, are felt to be at stake."

Whereas some isolated individuals and primitive societies may be relatively free from the competitive spirit, an over-all view reveals that competition appears to be an ineradicable trait of human nature. It is true that not all men compete with the same intensity. Some even tend to escape it whenever possible. Still it is difficult to see how any active person can escape all forms of competition for a single day. Competition being therefore an indisputable fact of life, the real question is how to keep it within proper bounds. Men should be esteemed not because they abstain from competition, but because they hold in check that fierce desire for supremacy which threatens the observance of the agreed-upon rules which alone distinguish competition from internecine warfare of deceptive and destructive conflict.

2) The Intensity of Competition

It is possible to place general limits upon the sphere in which competitive processes are socially beneficial if not absolutely necessary. When this selective process has performed its function, when it has answered the question who is best qualified for the job, who is the best contestant, who can produce the best product at the least cost, etc., then competition has served its purpose and there is little to be gained by its continuance. Where men have common interests it is only reasonable for them to cooperate rather than compete. In those cases where the interests of men are opposed, competition is usually the most equitable way of coping with the problem.

There is another, and quite different aspect to the moral problem of competition. The moral level of competition is largely dependent on the conditions under which it takes place. The more intense the competitive drive, the more significance success carries with it, the greater will be the compulsion to tamper with the agreed-upon rules. Thus a highly developed competitive spirit may result in a whole host of moral ills which are inevitably or essentially connected with it. Deceit, lying, hypocrisy, etc., all too often do follow in the wake of an intense competitive spirit.

Competition is often said to be in its very nature anti-social, a state of war instead of a state of peace, generating hostile passions in the place of sympathy and love. Open and declared opposition, however, is not the thing most likely to
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give rise to hatred and jealousy. Where a conflict takes place under recognized rules and conditions which are observed by both parties, it does not necessarily give rise to bitter feelings. Bitterness arises when there is, or is believed to be, something unfair, some exception, some infractions of the rules resulting in unjust discriminations. Open competition does not generate hostility. Rather it is among those removed from open and equal competition that hatred and jealousy are most rife.

Competition and Sportsmanship

In any discussion of "Sport and Ethics" it would seem that sportsmanship would become a crucial or pivotal point. Yet the term does not even appear in the index of Paul Weiss' book on Sport. Why? Was it consciously and deliberately rejected as of no importance? Or were its complexities and ambiguities too great to unravel? Was he simply being consistent in avoiding the ethical aspects of sport in their entirety? (except for one single indexed reference.)

Whatever the reasons for Weiss' omission, sportsmanship has always had numerous champions who have made remarkable claims for it as a moral category. Albert Camus, Nobel prize winner for literature in 1957 said that it was from sports that he learned all that he knew about ethics. Henry Steele Commager, Professor of History at Amherst College, argued that it was on the playing fields that Americans learned the lessons of courage and honor which distinguished them in time of war. Commager concluded: "In one way or another, this code of sportsmanship had deeply influenced our national destiny." For Lyman Bryson of Columbia University, sportsmanship was of extraordinary value: "It could be established, I think, that the next best thing to the rule of love is the rule of sportsmanship. This virtue, without which democracy is impossible and freedom uncertain has not yet been taken seriously enough in education."

Sportsmanship, when not viewed as the pinnacle of moral perfection, can also be viewed as a moral minimum—one step this side of criminality. In the same vein, the term "poor sportsmanship" is sometimes used as a euphemism for criminal behavior. A recent example of such verbal tomfoolery can be found in the explanation of Commissioner Wayne Duke of the Big Ten Athletic Conference concerning the assault and riot which interrupted the Minnesota-Ohio State basketball game last year. In justifying the suspension of two of the players involved in the assault, Commissioner Duke said that they were suspended for "unsportsmanlike conduct."

It is precisely in difficulties of this type that our functional definitions demonstrate their practical value. The source of the confusion which vitiates most discussion of sportsmanship is the unwarranted assumption that athletics and truly playful activities are so similar in nature that a single code of conduct and similar participant attitudes are equally applicable to radically diverse
activities. Not only is such an attempt doomed to failure, but a consequence of this abortive effort is the proliferation of various moral virtues under the flag of sportsmanship, which, thus, loses all its distinctiveness. It is variously viewed as a straight road to moral perfection or an antidote to moral corruption.

Now since I hold that athletics and play are two distinct species under the genus “sport” and that they are easily distinguishable and radically diverse types of human activity, I should be prepared to offer what I have characterized as functional definitions of each. First, consider athletics. Athletics are physical contests designed to determine human excellence through an honorable victory in a contest. Thus they are competitive by their very nature. Professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey are excellent examples of athletic contests. So, also, are the various Olympic contests, intercollegiate and inter-scholastic contests. In fact, even most of the highly organized Little-league contests must be regarded as athletics. Play, on the other hand, is free, creative activity in which the goal of the participants is to maximize the joy of the moment, seeking no goal outside the activity itself. Good examples of this type of activity are

“Sportsmanship” As Applied To Playful Activities

In itself sportsmanship as it applies to genuine play is a spirit, an attitude, a manner or mode of interpreting an otherwise purely legal code. Its purpose is to protect and cultivate the festive mood proper to an activity whose primary purpose is amusement, pleasure, joy. The player adopts a cavalier attitude toward his personal rights under the code. He prefers to be magnanimous and self-sacrificing if, by such conduct, he contributes to the enjoyment of the game.

Our insistence that the genuine player is primarily interested in maximizing the pleasure or joy of the moment does not imply that he makes no effort to win the games which he enters. It is common practice for him, once the game is under way, to make a determined effort to win. However, spirited competitor which he appears to be, his goal is joy in the activity itself. Anything which makes the game itself less enjoyable should be eliminated. He “fights” to win because experience has taught him that a determined effort to overcome the obstacles which his particular game has constructed adds immeasurably to the enjoyment of the game. He would be cheating himself and robbing the other participants of intense pleasure if his efforts were only half-hearted. Yet there is an important sense in which playful activity is not competitive but rather co-operative. Competition denotes the struggle of two parties for the same valued object and implies that, to the extent that one of the parties is successful in the struggle, he gains exclusive possession of the object at the expense of his fellow competitors. But the goal of playful activity, being the mutual enjoyment of the participants, cannot even be understood in terms of exclusive possession by one of the parties. Its simulated competitive atmosphere camouflages what is, at
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bottom, a highly cooperative endeavor to maximize the immediate pleasure or joy to be found in the activity itself.

"Sportsmanship" In Athletics

Careful analysis has revealed that playful activity, while speaking the language of competition and constantly appearing in its livery, is fundamentally a cooperative venture. Its code for the "sportsman" (player) is directed fundamentally to facilitating the cooperative effort and removing all possible barriers to its development. Mutual generosity is a most fertile soil to cooperative activity. When we move from play to athletics, however, a drastic change takes place. Cooperation is no longer the goal. Competition now becomes the order of the day. The objective of the athlete demands exclusive possession. Two cannot share in the same victory unless they are teammates, and, as a result, the problems of competition are immediately in evidence. "Sportsmanship," insofar as it connotes the behavior proper to the athlete, seeks to place certain basic limitations on the rigors of competition, just as continual efforts are being made to soften the impact of the competitive struggle in economics, politics, international relations, etc. But we must not lose sight of an important distinction. Competition in these real-life areas is condoned or encouraged to the extent that it contributes to the common good. It is not regarded as an end in itself but as the only or most practical means to socially desirable ends.

Friedrich A. Hayek, renowned economist and champion of competition in economics, supports this position. "The liberal argument in favor of making the best possible use of the forces of competition, as a means of coordinating human efforts . . . is based on the conviction that, where effective competition can be created it is a better way of guiding individual efforts than any other. It does not deny, but even emphasizes that, in order that competition should work beneficially, a carefully thought-out legal framework is required and that neither the existing nor the past legal rules are free from grave defects. Nor does it deny that, where it is impossible to create the conditions necessary to make competition effective, we must resort to other methods of guiding economic activity." A code which seeks to mitigate the full force of the competitive conflict is also desirable in athletics. While the athlete is in essence a prizefighter, he seeks to demonstrate his excellence in a contest governed by rules which acknowledge human worth and dignity.

For the athlete, being a good "sportsman" is most frequently demonstrated by the self-control he demonstrates in the face of adversity. A festive attitude is not called for; it is, in fact, often viewed as in bad taste. The purists or rigorists are of the opinion that a brief period of seclusion and mourning may be more appropriate. They know that for the real competitor, defeat in an important contest seems heartbreaking and nerve-shattering. The athlete who can control himself in such circumstances demonstrates remarkable equanimity.
To ask that he enter into the festive mood of the victory celebration is to request a Pagliacci-like performance. There is no need for phony displays of congratulations. A simple handshake demonstrates that no personal ill-will is involved. No alibis or complaints are offered. No childish excuses about the judgment of officials or the natural conditions. No temper tantrums. To be a good loser under his code, the athlete need not be exactly gracious in defeat, but he must at least "be a man" about it.

After an athlete has trained and sacrificed for weeks, after he has dreamed of victory and its fruits and literally exhausted himself physically and emotionally in its pursuit—after all this—to ask him to act with fairness in the contest, with modesty in victory and an admirable composure in defeat is to demand a great deal, and yet, this is the substance of the demand that "sportsmanship" makes upon the athlete—amateur or professional.

The essence of "sportsmanship" as applied to athletics can be determined by the application of one simple principle—the goal of an activity is the principle determinant of the conduct and attitudes proper to that activity. Honorable victory is the goal of the athlete, and, as a result, the code of the athlete demands that nothing be done before, during, or after the contest to cheapen or otherwise detract from such a victory. Fairness or "fair play," the pivotal virtue in athletics, emphasizes the need for an impartial and equal application of the rules if the victory is to signify, as it should, athletic excellence. Modesty in victory and a quiet composure in defeat testify to an admirable and extraordinary self-control and, in general, dignify and enhance the goal of the athlete.

Most of the moral problems posed by athletics can be traced to one single source—its highly competitive nature. When competition becomes excessive in athletics, it almost invariably results in moral problems of one type or another. If, however, athletics are competitive by nature, at what point can the competition be said to be excessive? As might be expected, competition loses its social and moral value when it ceases to maintain its judicial role as the determinant of athletic superiority or excellence. This occurs when the desire to win becomes so excessive that it employs immoral means in the quest for victory. Some of these illicit means are hypocrisy, disregard for one's promises or the physical well-being of the fans and participants, incitement to riot, and The abridgement of one's natural rights and freedom.

Amateurism And Hypocrisy

A careful study of the nature of athletics clearly indicates that the amateur ideal in today's socio-economic world is so impractical that adherence to this Victorian ideal encourages otherwise honorable men and women to all types of ludicrous posturing which can only be characterized as open hypocrisy.

If the competitor is truly an athlete, if his desire is to excel on ever-increas-
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In the recent past, the Olympic Games have provided us with international examples of pathetic or tragic cases in which unfortunate athletes, after being forced to sign the Olympic Oath, were rebuked for tampering with the amateur code. Those close to the Olympic scene knew for decades that there were many liberties taken with the Olympic Oath. Finally the explosion came in Mexico City in 1968 with the infamous track shoe scandal. There were pitiful pleas for information concerning payoffs from officials who were totally derelict in their duties if they were, in fact, ignorant of what was transpiring. There were threats of life suspensions and medal forfeitures. But the widespread nature of the fraud prevented any punitive action. In the end it was conservatively estimated that about 200 athletes were paid off. If action had been taken, the U.S. would have been practically medal-less since it was reliably estimated that no more than five U.S. medal winners emerged with clean hands.

Bill Toomey, the U.S. gold medalist in the decathlon summed up the matter. "It is time for athletes to take money and be open and honest or not to take it. The hypocrisy is what's killing us, not the money."

Hypocrisy is truly the chief culprit where amateurism is concerned. In the winter Olympics of the same Olympiad, Marc Hodler, the president of the International Ski Federation, fought in vain to get Avery Brundage to face up to this fact. After threats of their withdrawal or expulsion, the skiers were permitted to ski in the Olympic Games but only after Karl Schranz, generally conceded to be the world's best skier, had been barred as a concession to Brundage. Hodler argued the case for the world class skiers. "... I told Avery that if we could control the manufacturers' temptations by having them go legally through our national federations, we might do away with much of the hypocrisy that has plagued us. I told him that, with the federation's contracts, the manufacturers would feel secure that the boys would not run out on using their equipment. And if they felt secure they would stop spending all Sundays and Mondays after the races in pure bribery to guarantee that they would keep their racers on their products."

Thus it appears that because of Olympic Rule No. 26 which clearly states: "An amateur is one who participates and has always participated in a sport as an avocation without gain of any kind," European skiing, according to its own president, is shot through with hypocrisy and pure bribery. Perhaps U.S. skiers have been more faithful to the amateur ideal. "Hell, no" says Bob Lange, a highly successful Colorado manufacturer. "The only skiers on the whole FIS
circuit that I have to pay under the table are Americans. They deserve the dough as much as anyone else, but, by God, the only way to pay them is on the sly. Talk about hypocrisy.”

The American skiers themselves would seem to agree with Bob Lange’s assessment. Spider Sabich, one of our fine amateur skiers who turned professional, said: “It was such a relief to stop as an amateur. I was fed up with the hypocrisy. Fed up with racing against guys who were making $50,000 a year, guys who had other people to wax their skis, sharpen their edges and who could go home when they got tired. I was too nervous trying to compete with what I thought were insufficient weapons. Now I have no worries.”

Athletes and the Use of Drugs

Wherever the intensity of the competitive spirit burns brightly as it always does in athletics, there will be a strong temptation to cheat. To the extent that any given drug promises to enhance an athlete’s performance, he will be sorely tempted to try it. Before, however, we become emotionally involved in the athletic drug scene, we should honestly face up to certain questions. Does the average athlete promise not to use drugs before or during a contest? If so, are such drugs generally regarded by the medical profession as a threat to his physical well-being? Does the use of certain drugs demonstrably enhance an athlete’s performance?

If an athlete promises not to use certain drugs or is forbidden to do so by his school or conference, then he is openly in violation of the public trust, even though the drugs have no beneficial effect upon his performance. If an athlete, in order to enhance his performance, uses drugs which the medical profession has pronounced dangerous or harmful, then his actions are highly suspect on the grounds that it is imprudent, if not irrational, to risk one’s physical integrity merely for the purpose of performing well in an athletic contest. In the absence of any contrary promise or medical prohibition, an athlete uses a drug to enhance his performance, we are faced with the old moral problem of “drawing the line.” Can he consume aspirin or alka-seltzer to cure a headache or an upset stomach in order to perform better? Can he drink coffee as a stimulant or beer as a depressant? Is there a basic ethical difference between taking a muscle-relaxer like valium whose side effects may not be fully known or giving anabolic steroids when both are done primarily in the attempt to help the athlete perform better?

To the extent that the use of drugs in athletics constitute a major public health problem or threatens the physical integrity of the athlete who uses them, drugs pose a serious moral problem for athletics. To the extent, however, that the fruits of the pharmaceutical science are openly employed, without documented physical hazards, it is pure romanticism to suggest that the use of drugs destroys the very nature of athletic competition. To hold that “for sport to be
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of interest, to have emotional impact, to be an artistic or commercial success, the contestants must be as equal as possible,” is a myth of great magnitude. Athletic greatness is a triumph of carefully cultivated inequalities. The only equality required is that set by the rules governing the conduct of the contest. The appeal to horse racing with its emphasis on age, sex, past performance and handicapping with extra weight ignores the primary motive for such steps. The motive which calls forth such efforts in horse racing is clearly that of encouraging wagering on the contest—a motive presumably less important in competition between athletes.

There is no doubt that, given their nature as prize fighters, athletes will always be in search of secret drugs which will give them at least a temporary advantage over their competitors. Hal Conolly, a veteran of four U.S. Olympic teams, summarizes succinctly: “My experience tells me that an athlete will use any aid to improve his performance short of killing himself.”

An important difference between athletic and nonathletic drugs can be made. An athlete takes many drugs that he would not take or be given if he were not an athlete. And the rationale for much athletic drug use is unique, for the drugs are not taken either with the intention or effect of improving or maintaining health, or to achieve a pleasurable sensation, but rather because the athlete or those around him believe he will perform better drugged than undrugged. Or the opposite could be the case. If organized gambling interests were involved, the temptation may even be stronger to administer drugs which would adversely affect performance. Administering drugs for this purpose is certainly as probable in horse racing as the attempt to enhance performance through drug usage.

It is a question of motive that directly effects the morality of the athletic drug problem. Athletic integrity is clearly a matter of public interest. It is an accepted moral maxim that an athlete will do everything in his power, coincident with the rules of the contest, to gain victory. If the use of certain drugs will predictably and adversely affect an athlete’s performance, then they should never be used unless accompanied by a pre-contest announcement. If, however, any food, exercise or drug not specifically banned by the rules is thought to be an aid in enhancing an athlete’s performance, it clearly falls within the bounds of the morally acceptable. The quest for some miracle drug could conceivably result in the unfortunate situation that the winners will not be the best athletes naturally, but the richest, those with the best pharmaceutical resources at their disposal. Such a possibility, however, is so remote that it can cause no legitimate moral concern today.

If too much competition can be a bad thing, it is also true that the absence of competition can also have serious adverse effects. Baseball’s “reserve clause” is a good case in point. After Curt Flood had been “sold” or traded to Philadelphia by the St. Louis Cardinals, he decided to test such unique employment practices in the courts. His first step was to appeal to the commissioner of baseball, Mr. Bowie Kuhn in the following words. “After 12 years in the major leagues, I do
not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes. I believe that any system which violates my basic rights as a citizen is inconsistent with the laws of the U.S. and of the several states.”

Mr. Kuhn was not moved by this argument, however, and Flood’s case went through all available legal channels until it reached the Supreme Court. On June 19, 1972 the Court ruled by a vote of 5 to 3 in favor of the “reserve clause” and against Curt Flood. While recognizing the fact that other “sports” have been more sharply restricted, as a result of various judicial decisions, in their control of player personnel, Justice Harry A. Blackmun, writing the majority decision, admitted the inconsistency, but refused to strike down the “reserve clause” as unconstitutional. He pointed to Congress as the proper place for redress.

Justice Thurgood Marshall argued that when the Court’s “errors deny substantially federal rights, like the right to compete freely and effectively to the best of one’s ability we must admit our error and correct it.” There would appear to be a form of serfdom involved here under which baseball players are bought and sold. And although the court does not say so, this archaic arrangement does not appear to be in conflict with the constitutional provisions against slavery since the performer can always quit—giving up his only precious and highly marketable talent—and turn to a type of work for which he is far less suited.

While professional football would appear to be far more liberal, the football draft requires that a player go to a city which drafted him despite the inconvenience and hardship it may cause his family. His only alternatives are to skip to the Canadian league or to give up that type of employment for which he is best qualified and which is most lucrative. Once signed it is true that technically a football player can become a free agent by playing out his option, but he is never free to sign with a new team simply by negotiating with it. His freedom, even after his option has expired, is dependent upon the exchange of a player by the new team who is in the opinion of the commissioner “a player of like quality.”
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FOOTNOTES

5 ibid., p. 58.
7 ibid., p. 135.
9 ibid., p. 70.
10 ibid., p. 387.
13 ibid., p. 296.
18 Sports Illustrated, 3-19-69, p. 22.
19 Sports Illustrated, 3-9-70, p. 16.
20 Sports Illustrated, 3-9-70, p. 15.
21 Sports Illustrated, 12-20-71, p. 92.
22 Sports Illustrated, 6-23-69, p. 70.