

developments inevitably change the terms of the controversies.

Play scholars with more general interests will probably wish that the author had made more explicit the connections between video play and other forms of play and between morality in this often nearly anonymous setting and in others. For the most part, the reader must make such connections—including connections to many other writings on video games. More importantly, perhaps, the author's descriptions of morality do not question the world of video games in general, a world where players commonly pursue individual quests against clearly recognized adversaries through a series of preestablished, increasingly difficult challenges. Her discussions of morality do not question the propriety of this antagonistic—and sometimes point-and-shoot—world but only the strategies that would allow one to be successful within it. There emerges a picture of a largely technocratic morality that does not investigate the broader goals or meanings of the activity. Such expansion of the meaning of morality might not be significant in itself; it becomes so to the extent that individuals cultivate their ideas of what is moral by playing online video games then applying those lessons to an e-trading, casino-capitalism model of human relationships—a model that celebrates success as a series of level-busting moves and says little at all about individuals' responsibilities to one another. To be sure, most of us submit ourselves to the "games" of our societies; the real challenge of play, as Johan Huizinga argued, is to determine the character of those societies.

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The Erosion of the American Sporting Ethos: Shifting Attitudes toward Competition

Joel Nathan Rosen

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007. Figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. x, 294 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780786429172.

Reflecting approvingly on the ancient Greek gusto for antagonism in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1994, first published 1887), Friedrich Nietzsche affirmed that "if we take away competition from Greek life, we gaze immediately into that pre-Homeric abyss of a gruesome savagery of hatred and pleasure in destruction" (p. 193). For Nietzsche, competition, athletic and otherwise, was a practice that led humans to flourish. As he clarified, without "competitive ambition, the Hellenistic state, like Hellenic man, deteriorates. It becomes evil and cruel" (p. 194). In spite of Nietzsche's praise, ancient Greek athletics were criticized by their contemporaries. Xenophanes, for one, thought that successful athletes received a disproportionate number of honors and rewards.

The narrative of *The Erosion of the American Sporting Ethos: Shifting Attitudes toward Competition* keeps at its core a structure that underscores the tension between defenders and condemners of competition. As Joel Rosen explains, the book is a "comprehensive analysis of the nature of competition in contemporary American sport in response to a perceptible withdrawal from the more traditional American competitive spirit" (p. 1). Much like Nietzsche, American supporters of the traditional competitive ethos emphasize its progressive character. By contrast, its detractors point to competitive sport's

immoderation, corruption, and debasement. Although for Rosen the origins of the American withdrawal from the traditional view of athletic competition as a fountain of vaunted values is found in the 1950s, it has recently garnered many more advocates.

The first three chapters of Rosen's book contextualize the American withdrawal from the traditional competitive ethos and chronicle its vicissitudes. Chapter 1 discusses the broader social and cultural forces from which the mounting criticism of contemporary sport emerged, and chapters 2 and 3 trace the historical development of the traditional competitive ethos. Specifically, chapter 2 recounts the role of competitive sport in American culture from the end of frontier life to World War II; and chapter 3, from the Cold War to the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The last four chapters examine the growing tendency to criticize contemporary athletic competition as incapable of promoting change or serving society. Chapter 4 investigates moral matters such as sportspersonship, hypercompetitiveness, violence, and role modeling in sport. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the status of youth sport. They explore the way youth sport is interpreted and portrayed nowadays as well as its increasing association with the acquisition and development of the self. Finally, chapter 7 investigates several schisms in contemporary sport advocacy, that, according to Rosen, have come to represent "the advancing and more commonly held conclusion that sport can no longer be held as a paean to American culture" (p. 5).

Rosen's writing is articulate and engaging. His research draws from a variety of primary and secondary sources, both

scholarly and popular. These include academic journals and books, newspapers and magazines, personal interviews, films, radio broadcasts, and Web sites. Rosen ably blends this wealth of sources to provide a richly textured account of the changing American attitude toward competitive sport. The book is at its best when summarizing the intricate historical path that first allowed the construction and consolidation of the traditional competitive ethos and subsequently led to its questioning and descent into disrepute. The reader is not left wondering about the reasons behind the current disenchantment with competitive sport.

However, the poignancy of the book's descriptive strength does not fully extend to the analysis of competitive sport's moral tensions. In spite of Rosen's theoretical discussion of competition in chapter 4, the structure and central purpose of competitive sport is not sufficiently explored. Given Rosen's complaint on page 1 of the book that "the nature of competition itself is rarely if ever engaged directly within the literature," this is puzzling. Rosen overlooks the vast sport-philosophy literature on the topic. Authors such as Warren P. Fraleigh, R. Scott Kretchmar, William J. Morgan, and Robert L. Simon have addressed at length not only what competitive sport entails but also how it relates to morality. An exploration of their theories could have strengthened the book's (implicit) normative evaluation of the American sporting ethos, past and current; for, as Rosen suggests at the end of the book, it is possible that so much criticism of competitive sport is unwarranted (p. 222).

In general, readers interested in understanding the rise of and the increasing withdrawal from the American traditional

competitive ethos will find this to be a valuable book. The book is also a helpful introductory reference to competitive sport's contemporary moral dilemmas, including the controversies surrounding youth sport. After reading this book, readers will have more tools to debate further whether or not the competitive zeal so familiar to ancient Greeks is a desirable element in contemporary life.

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Investigating Play in the 21st Century: Play & Culture Studies, Volume 7

Dorothy Justus Sluss and Olga S. Jarrett, eds.

Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007. Foreword, tables, figures, references, index. 324 pp. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780761836407

The Association for the Study of Play (TASP) is a multidisciplinary organization that focuses on play studies. It consists of anthropologists, educators, folklorists, musicologists, scientists, psychologists, kinesiologists, and historians, and its members meet annually to discuss and disseminate scholarly investigations on the importance of play. Since 1998, TASP has published *Play & Culture Studies*, a scholarly journal on the topic of play, and Dorothy Justus Sluss and Olga Jarrett, co-editors of volume seven, have produced an exceptional issue. This publication not only has something for everyone (academics, educators, parents, communities,

agencies, and players) but the practical and theoretical contributions are timely, informative, and sometimes fundamental. Not since Albert Ellis (1973) have so many models for explaining play's role been represented in one publication.

Regrettably, most of the scientific community has neglected and ignored play or been dismissive of this topic as too frivolous for serious consideration. Many of those in the field of education remain wary and suspicious of play as a subject for serious scholarship, and advances in play research have been scattered and scarce. The only exceptions have been TASP's conferences and publications (though play scholars welcome the new spotlight from the *American Journal of Play*). Sluss's epilogue in this book focuses on this wariness, the main conundrum for play and culture studies. Play can be immature, disrespectful, and chaotic, but these very characteristics enliven our existence and render our lives worthwhile, a truth reflected in every chapter of this outstanding, delightful, and insightful publication.

The volume begins with three theoretical challenges in part 1. Joe L. Frost's article, "Genesis and Evolution of American Play and Playgrounds," clamors against the demise of spontaneous play and advocates for the return in importance of natural play spaces. "The Promise of Sociology for Play Studies," by Thomas S. Henricks, asserts that play is more about social interaction, more about influencing and being influenced by others, than it is about the game itself. He says developmental psychologists (and parents) acknowledged long ago that interacting, spending time with a child, is a more powerful motivator of feelings and produces more satisfaction, enjoyment, competency, and resiliency