

# AP Seminar Performance Task 2: Individual Research-Based Essay and Presentation

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Directions and Stimulus Materials

January 2021



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## Introduction

This performance task, highlighted in bold below, is one of three parts of the overall assessment for AP Seminar, and one of two performance tasks. The assessment for this course comprises the following:

Performance Task 1: Team Project and Presentation

- › Component 1: Individual Research Report
- › Component 2: Team Multimedia Presentation and Oral Defense

**Performance Task 2: Individual Research-Based Essay and Presentation**

- › **Component 1: Individual Written Argument**
- › **Component 2: Individual Multimedia Presentation**
- › **Component 3: Oral Defense**

End-of-Course Exam

- › Part A: Three Short-Answer Questions (based on one source)
- › Part B: One Essay Question (based on four sources)

The attached pages include the directions for Performance Task 2, information about the weighting of the task within the overall assessment, and detailed information as to the expected quantity and quality of work that you should submit.

Also included are the stimulus materials for the task. These materials are theme-based and broadly span the academic curriculum. After analyzing the materials, develop a research question that suits your individual interest based on a thematic connection between at least two of the stimulus materials. Your research question must be rich enough to allow you to engage in meaningful exploration and to write and present a substantive, defensible argument.

# AP Seminar Performance Task 2: Individual Research-Based Essay and Presentation

## Student Version

**Weight:** 35% of the AP Seminar score

## Task Overview

This packet includes a set of stimulus materials for the AP Seminar Performance Task 2: Individual Research-Based Essay and Presentation.

You must identify a research question prompted by analysis of the provided stimulus materials, gather information from a range of additional sources, develop and refine an argument, write and revise your argument, and create a presentation that you will be expected to defend orally immediately following your presentation. Your teacher will give you a deadline for when you need to submit your written argument and presentation media. Your teacher will also give you a date on which you will give your presentation.

Task Components	Length	Date Due (fill in)
Individual Written Argument (IWA)	2,000 words	
Individual Multimedia Presentation (IMP)	6–8 minutes	
Oral Defense (OD)	Respond to 2 questions	

In all written work, you must:

- Acknowledge, attribute, and/or cite sources using in-text citations, endnotes or footnotes, and/or through bibliographic entry. You must avoid plagiarizing (see the attached AP Capstone Policy on Plagiarism and Falsification or Fabrication of Information).
- Adhere to established conventions of grammar, usage, style, and mechanics.

## Task Directions

### 1. Individual Written Argument (2,000 words)

- › Read and analyze the provided stimulus materials to identify thematic connections among the sources and possible areas for inquiry.
- › Compose a research question of your own prompted by analysis of the stimulus materials. Your question must relate to a theme that connects at least two of the stimulus materials.
- › Gather information from a range of additional sources representing a variety of perspectives, including scholarly work.
- › Analyze, evaluate, and select evidence. Interpret the evidence to develop a well-reasoned argument that answers the research question and conveys your perspective.
- › Throughout your research, continually revisit and refine your original research question to ensure that the evidence you gather addresses your purpose and focus.
- › Identify and evaluate opposing or alternate views and consider their implications and/or limitations as you develop resolutions, conclusions, or solutions to your research question.

- › Compose a coherent, convincing and well-written argument in which you:
  - Explain the significance or importance of your research question by situating it within a larger context.
  - Establish a well-organized argument that links claims and evidence and leads to a specific and plausible conclusion, resolution or solution that addresses your research question.
  - Integrate at least one of the stimulus materials as part of your argument. (For example, as providing relevant context for the research question or as evidence to support relevant claims.)
  - Evaluate different perspectives by considering objections to them, and their limitations and/or implications.
  - Include relevant evidence from credible sources to support your claims. You should include evidence from scholarly work.
  - Cite all sources that you have used, including the stimulus materials, and include a list of works cited or a bibliography.
  - Use correct grammar and a style appropriate for an academic audience.

- › Abide by the 2,000-word limit (excluding footnoted citations, bibliography, and text in figures or tables). Word count does include titles, sub-headings, and in-text citations.
- › Remove references to your name, school, or teacher.
- › Upload your document to the AP Digital Portfolio as directed by your teacher.

### 2. Individual Multimedia Presentation (6–8 minutes)

- › Develop and prepare a multimedia presentation that will convey the argument from your final paper to an educated, non-expert audience.
- › Be selective about the information you choose for your presentation by focusing on key points you want your audience to understand.
- › Design your oral presentation with supporting visual media (e.g., presentation slides, a poster, a website), and consider audience, context, and purpose.
- › Prepare to engage your audience using appropriate strategies (e.g., eye contact, vocal variety, expressive gestures, movement).

- › Prepare notecards or an outline that you can quickly reference as you are speaking so that you can interact with supporting visuals and the audience.
- › Rehearse your presentation in order to refine your design and practice your delivery.
- › Check that you can do the presentation within the 6- to 8-minute time limit.
- › Deliver a 6- to 8-minute multimedia presentation in which you:
  - Contextualize and identify the importance of your research question.
  - Explain the connection between your research and your analysis of the stimulus materials.
  - Deliver a well-organized argument that connects claims and evidence.
  - Incorporate and synthesize relevant evidence from various perspectives to support your argument. Make sure you cite or attribute the evidence you use to support your claims (either orally or visually).
  - Offer a plausible resolution(s), conclusion(s), and/or solution(s) based on evidence and consider the implications of any suggested solutions.
  - Engage the audience with an effective and clearly organized presentation design that guides them through your argument.
  - Engage the audience with effective techniques of delivery and performance.

### 3. Individual Oral Defense

Defend your research process, use of evidence, and conclusion(s), solution(s), or recommendation(s) through oral responses to two questions asked by your teacher. Be prepared to describe and reflect on your process as well as defend and extend your written work and oral presentation. Make sure you include relevant and specific details about your work in your answers.

## Sample Oral Defense Questions

Here are some examples of the types of questions your teacher might ask you during your oral defense. These are *examples only*; your teacher may ask you different questions, but there will still be one question that relates to each of the following two categories.

### 1. Reflection on Research Process

- › How did some preliminary information you gathered inform your research?
- › What evidence did you gather that you didn't include? Why did you choose not to include it?
- › How did your research question evolve as you moved through the research process?
- › Did your research go in a different direction than you originally expected?
- › What information did you need that you weren't able to find or locate?
- › How did you approach and synthesize the differing perspectives in order to reach a conclusion?

### 2. Extending argumentation through effective questioning and inquiry

- › What additional questions emerged from your research? Why are these questions important?
- › What are the implications of your findings to your community?
- › How is your conclusion in conversation with the body of literature or other research sources you examined?
- › How did you use the conclusions or questions of others to advance your own research?

## **AP Capstone™ Policy on Plagiarism and Falsification or Fabrication of Information**

A student who fails to acknowledge the source or author of any and all information or evidence taken from the work of someone else through citation, attribution or reference in the body of the work, or through a bibliographic entry, will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that fails to properly acknowledge sources or authors on the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.

A student who incorporates falsified or fabricated information (e.g. evidence, data, sources, and/or authors) will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that incorporates falsified or fabricated information in the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.



## Empowering Women Through Sport

**Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**, United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, offers her perspective on how sport can help advance gender equality around the world.

From the *Olympic Review*, January - February - March 2019, Number 110

As a South African, I continue to be moved by the words of Nelson Mandela, who said: *“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair”*.

We have an opportunity to put these ideals into action for the realization of gender equality and women’s empowerment—both in sport itself and in the wider world, through sport. Sport can be one of the great drivers of gender equality, by teaching women and girls the values of teamwork, self-reliance and resilience. It can provide girls with social connections and a refuge from violence in their homes and communities, and help them to understand their bodies and build confidence and the ability to speak up, particularly during adolescence, when the pressure to conform to traditionally “feminine” stereotypes leads many girls to abandon sport entirely.

### One Win Leads to Another

The power of sport to change the lives of the most marginalized girls and young women can be seen in the success of *One Win Leads to Another (OWLA)*, a joint partnership between UN Women and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that is a legacy of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. It combines sport practice with life-skills education for girls in the most vulnerable, and often violent, communities. And thanks to the generous support of the IOC and additional funding partners, it continues to grow and deliver real results (see graphic, opposite).

## ONE WIN LEADS TO ANOTHER

### - FACTS AND FIGURES -

By the time they left the programme in Brazil, participants had an improved understanding of sexual health and rights, and increased self confidence, as these figures highlight:

**89%**

of girls said they were a leader, compared to **46%** before the programme

**93%**

of girls knew where to report violence

**79%**

of girls knew how to prevent pregnancy, compared to **25%** before

**77%**

of girls knew how to prevent sexually transmitted infections, compared to **21%** before

**99%**

of girls believed that they would one day get a job

Beneficiaries include girls like 19-year-old Dayane Santos who dropped out of school after her daughter was born. After one year in the programme, Dayanne has been able to finish high school, land a full-time job and better negotiate time spent on childcare and housework with her partner. She also plays volleyball twice a week in a community centre. Raphaela Barbosa Lacerda, a 2016 graduate, was recently hired by the research and innovation team of an international cosmetics company. “Participating in the *One Win Leads to Another* programme gave me maturity to face my problems, knowledge to express my ideas, and courage to fight for my dreams,” she said. “It was one of the things that most helped me achieve what I want.”

In October 2018, we launched a new phase of the programme in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the context of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG). With the help of the sports community we aim to continue expanding, so that *One Win Leads to Another* becomes a legacy for all Olympic Games and major sporting events going forward, and contributes to building an international movement of girls in sport.

## Tackling wider inequalities

At the same time, the world of sport remains plagued by many of the same gender inequalities that we see more broadly; issues such as unequal pay, gender-based violence, a lack of targeted investment and negative stereotypes and social norms.

In workplaces around the world, women earn an average of 77 per cent of men's salaries, for work of equal value. Similarly, in the sports arena, we see massive gaps in the prize money, sponsorships, facilities and equipment allocated to women athletes. International Federations play a vital role in reversing this trend, and I applaud FIFA for launching a global strategy for women's football in October 2018. It makes a strong public commitment to invest in and improve the women's game—not only as the right thing to do, but from the very practical standpoint of tapping into its massive revenue-generating potential. We need to see more efforts like this resulting in salaries and prize money for female athletes that are equal to what the men get. Match scheduling is also a form of investment. Where women's matches conflict with men's, competition for viewership can create a vicious cycle of ratings being used to justify lower prize money, lower pay for female athletes and feed into the narrative of women's sport being of lesser value. It's time to turn this around and see how investing in women's sport overall, from community to professional levels, can improve girls'

athletic opportunities, build the status of women's sport and reap the wider benefits to society.

It's not only women who benefit from a more gender equal approach to sport and efforts to change outdated stereotypes of "locker room" masculinity. In November 2018, Fenerbahçe Sports Club, one of the oldest and most popular multi-sports clubs in Turkey, joined forces with HeForShe in an 'Equal together' initiative involving its male football players, and seen by its global fan base of 25 million. They aim to achieve gender equality transformation through sport, with women- and children-friendly stadium practices, and a zero-tolerance approach to all sorts of discrimination against women and girls.

In many communities, it's not just discrimination, but gender-based violence that keeps girls off the playing field. It's only recently that instances of violence and other forms of abuse have been more systematically brought to light within the sports community. All too frequently in the past, athletes, coaches and officials have turned a blind eye to sexual harassment and abuse. This has led to a culture of victim-blaming for those who come forward and the reinforcement of a "boys will be boys" culture that normalises, and therefore perpetuates, abuse.

In some instances, complicity and cover-ups have led to decades of abuse that affected hundreds of women, as was the case with USA Gymnastics, where young female athletes were sexually assaulted by gym owners, coaches and staff working for gymnastics programmes.

Other incidents have involved male abusers who are shielded from consequences to protect their athletic status. And recently, there has been investigation into a series of cases of physical, sexual and verbal abuse in the Republic of Korea, following brave testimony from a short track speed skater and other female athletes. The National Olympic Committee President

has commented on the revelation of the systemic flaws and power imbalances between coach and young athlete that have perpetuated such abuse; this is a lesson for all.

The sporting world must catch up with the #MeToo era and take action to end the culture of sexism, abuse of power, harmful stereotypes—including toxic masculinities—and impunity that perpetuates violence against women and girls within its ranks. I applaud the IOC for taking significant steps to develop tools and guidelines to prevent and respond to harassment and abuse, many of which I saw in practice when I was in Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Olympic Games.

The IOC has also taken measures to safeguard athletes during the Buenos Aires 2018 Youth Olympic Games, and at the Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang 2018, where a clear structure was in place for participants to report any incident of harassment or abuse via the IOC Safeguarding Officer. By communicating the expectations of its membership and the availability of its resources to end violence against women and girls in sport, and exploring incentives to strengthen accountability for action, the IOC can go even further to ensure that abuse and harassment have no place in the Olympic Movement.

## **Female athletes as role models and advocates**

Stereotypes, discriminatory social norms and a lack of representation remain some of the most pervasive barriers to gender equality around the world. Even when laws and policies are in place, deep-seated attitudes about gender roles can hold back substantive change. We need visible role models of female athletes excelling on the field of play and reaching the Olympic podium, so that girls see, and believe in their own capabilities.

That is why it is essential overall to feature women's champions more prominently, to show girls, boys, women and men alike what female athletes can achieve. This requires concerted efforts to work with the media to increase their coverage of women in sport, as well as boosting the number and visibility of female sport reporters and analysts at major events, and to call out sexist portrayals and double standards for women athletes' behaviour and attire. We also need more male athletes to step up with us, and model a culture that reflects equality, respect for diversity and non-violence, within and beyond sport.

Not only are successful sportswomen showing girls that they can excel on the field; many are using their status to start important conversations about gender equality and to advocate for women's rights more widely. For example, tennis players like Serena Williams and Victoria Azarenka spoke up about losing their rankings after they took time off to have children. The issue garnered major media attention and in December 2018 the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) announced that it was changing its special ranking rule so that a player's rank would be frozen in the event of pregnancy, injury or illness.

The WTA also said that it would not penalize women for wearing leggings or compression shorts in lieu of a skirt at their tournaments, something for which Williams was admonished after opting for a compression outfit to manage blood clots following childbirth. More visible female athletes means more platforms to advocate for issues that affect a multitude of women, both on and off the court. And more vocal female athletes bring change.

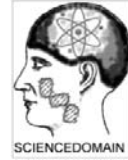
In 2018, UN Women proudly welcomed one of the most celebrated women in sport, Marta Vieira da Silva, as our Goodwill Ambassador for Gender Equality and Sport. As a six-time FIFA Player of the Year, widely regarded as the best

female football (soccer) player of all time, Marta is an inspiration to millions of girls around the world. Her life story illustrates many of the barriers that women still face in sport, the sheer determination that it takes to overcome these, and how sport can change women's and girls' lives completely. Marta will support UN Women's efforts by working to inspire women and girls to challenge stereotypes, overcome barriers and follow their ambitions.

Most importantly, let us support all of those who are using sport as a force to advance equality and opportunity; female athletes like Marta who will ensure that the next generation of girls grow up knowing that they can excel at the highest levels; male athletes who present a new model of masculinity; and sports organisations who are taking action to level the playing field, so that sport not only creates more opportunities for women and girls on the field, but leads the way in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across all of society.



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## Psychological Benefits of Sports and Physical Activities

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### **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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**Review Article**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Growing evidence is converging to suggest that different metabolic and cognitive functions are improved by and after physical exercise. They include prevention of certain mood impairments such as depression, strengthening of the immune system to cope with certain diseases or reducing stress subjective perception and disability causes by specific pain. In this last sense, the discomfort threshold has been demonstrated to be modified in habitual sportsmen and sportswomen, being more resistant to pain. Physical activity acts on many metabolic aspects and we will expose in this review article three of these pillars of action, with examples and scientific references. On the other hand, variables such as frequency and pace of physical exercises are important to consider for possible health profits. In this sense, seconds, minutes and repetitions of each specific exercise are of much importance for its accurate benefits and for taking into account to design a proper working out sport training routine.

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*Keywords: Endorphin; threshold pain; attention; sport; physical activities; benefits; gains; profit; welfare; depression; immune system; fatigue.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports are defined as all forms of competitive physical activity, through causal or organized participation in teams, which aims to maintain or improve human physical ability and skills, usually offering entertainment to participants and cheerfulness to winners. In some cases there are spectators or public who watch the sportive competition and do not participate themselves with any physical activity. On the other hand, physical activity does not necessarily imply the competitive component in teams, because it can be done individually and it is defined as any muscular effort or movements during personal systematic training, working out through different exercises. Those exercises are equally aimed to improve individual human physical ability and skills. Therefore, physical activity is usually a series of different modalities of physical exercises, involving different parts and muscles of the body and it is an essential previous step for any sport. Moreover, sport and physical exercises are sharing many common goals.

Recent studies show that physical exercises, regardless of type, from aerobic as even walking fast to anaerobic, at least three times per week, would decrease the risk of dementia over 65 years of age by up to 32 % [1-3], reaffirming the literal meaning of "healthy mind in a healthy body".

Physical activity acts on many metabolic aspects and we will expose in this review article three of these pillars of action with examples and scientific references:

- a) Physical well-being: Sport reduces stress [4] and facilitates endorphins release [5]. Also sport improves the immune system [6,7].
- b) Emotional well-being: Sport affects psychological elements such as self confidence [8,9] and it also reduces the risk of depression [10,11].
- c) Modification of the threshold for discomfort or pain: during exercise and after that, it helps to control pain perception [12,13].

In a pilot questionnaire performed among people who usually trains often (more than 3 times per week; N = 10) in a public sports center (gym), we collected these responses: 100% of respondents

considered physical activities reduce stress; 85% of respondents felt that physical activities are improving mood; 100% of respondents considered physical activities enhance the immune system and 85% of respondents asserted physical activities are affecting subjective perception of pain.

In this article we are explaining the benefits of physical exercise of a certain intensity as achievable during sport practicing. It is known the sentence "no pain no gain", but it is not clear whether or how much pain is required to reach the psychological advantages of sport, for instance, as getting a better mood, being happier or less sad. Scientific data are mainly informing about the possible effects on health with aerobic exercises that are those making heart, lung, sweat gland and whole metabolism to work hard and awaking body to life, but anaerobic ones are also causing changes for good in metabolism and they are barely mentioned in research papers. Pain subjective perception is not the same in sportsmen and sportswomen, compared to sedentary persons [14].

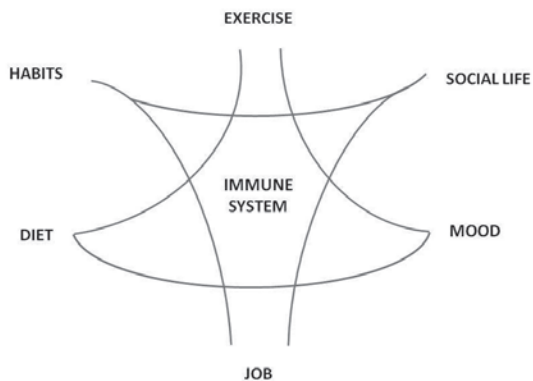
## 2. Physical well-being: Release of Endorphins

Some scientific studies have shown that stress generated in our muscles during sports practicing are helping to release our own tensions [15,16] and to reduce our stress level [4]. The endorphins hypothesis is the most popular explanation about how a physical mechanism is underlying the profits of sports. In the brain, the hypothalamus produces endorphins in the form of peptides and pituitary releases them into blood circulation. Later on, these endorphins are acting on their own receptors. It has been demonstrated *In vivo* that professional runners are releasing endogenous opioids, in the frontolimbic brain regions, after a sustained and intense physical exercise practice. That release is, in fact, closely correlated with perceived subjective euphoria [17].

Therefore, endorphins are neuropeptides which are produced by the body itself and are related to the immune system. It has been shown that immune cells are capable of producing neuropeptides itself, like endogenous opioids and endorphins [6,7]. This fact is pointing out the bidirectional link and the communicative route



between the nervous and the immune systems, that might be improved with sport exercises. Endogenous opioid peptides are released in response to physical exercise, as well as the immunomodulation mechanism is activated [6]. Even the mere gesture of smiling makes us to increase secretion of endorphins [18], however, it is well known that the immune system is affected by many other variables apart from sports. That might be the reason why a casual relationship is so difficult to establish, as it is visually explained in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1. Schematic visual representation of the possible elements that are affecting our immune system. Multidimensional relationship happening between different variables is visually explained**

The release of endorphins plays a role in adaptive changes during training, reaching its maximum level after 120 minutes of training [19]. However, there are variations between different athletes and their degree of previous training [19], depending on each routine or sport specialization. In resistance exercises, it has been reported changes in endorphin levels, depending on the intensity and time of exercise [20].

Beta-endorphins have been linked to the modulation of production for macrophage cells (Mphi) and for T cells and B cells of the immune system [6,7,21]. Serotonin release has been shown to be of importance for T-cell activation, as well as macrophage accessory functions [6,7]. Thus, playing sports regularly could have an effect over the serotonin release, making stronger our immune systems to better cope with certain diseases or to prevent them to appear. That might happen through the stimulating effect of sport and physical activity on the release of endogenous substances related to immune system. That could be causing an improvement

of the immune response toward infectious agents.

### 3. EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: PREVENTION OF DEPRESSIONS

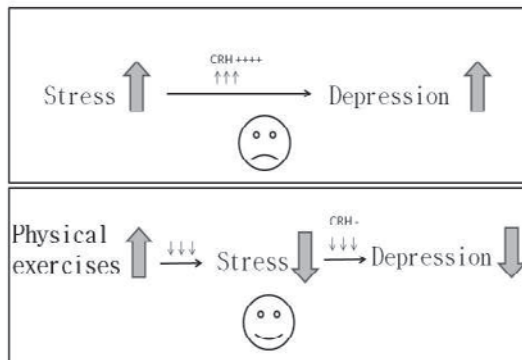
So far, most studies found in scientific literature that have investigated the relationship between physical exercise and levels of depression, are correlational rather than parametrical, indicating a possible preventive effect of depression or a moderate reduction of depressive symptoms instead of a cure. While there is no conclusive evidence that exercise causes a change for the better in the mood, exercise appears to be strongly associated with quite a number of positive changes in mood. It has been demonstrated these positive changes did occur in a group who practiced often exercise and did not occur, at all, in a group who were sedentary [10]. On the other hand, serotonin that is the most extensively studied neurotransmitter of the central nervous system associated with mood changes and antidepressive effects, is increased after physical exercise [6,7].

The vast majority of studies found in scientific literature that research the relationship between physical exercise and psychological variables have used mainly the aerobics exercises while anaerobic sports have been barely studied [4]. On the other hand, it has been evidenced that exercise has to be of sufficient duration and intensity to produce any significant positive psychological effects [10], being for that reason so important discipline and constancy in working out for any good results.

In relation to stress, it has been shown plasma levels of corticosteroids (corticotropin releasing hormone- CRH) may increase the likelihood of depression [22,23]. Therefore, and logically, if a reduction of stress is happening via sports, then that might reduce the risk of depression (Fig. 2).

Moreover, the stimulation of general brain activity has been proven to prevent the risk of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, through a possible repairing activational mechanism [2,23]. Consequently, the practice of physical exercise and sports would be activating the motor areas of the brain and that fact could have a long-term beneficial effects through the plasticity of the brain. The same mechanism known as "use it or lose it" for general brain functions has been suggested [24]. Then, physical exercises would be adding gains to the brain health via sports. The plasticity of the motor

cortex related to the movements does exist and it has a very important genetic component in terms of acquisition of motor patterns [25,26]. Then, practicing sports might improve and spread for the good the synaptic connections related to movements in the motor cortex, till reach the incredible levels of abilities and skills of professional athletes. Because it is known as well “there are no strong bodies created under the supervision of weak minds” (personal quote Pauline Nordine).



**Fig. 2. Possible logical relationship between physical exercises and depression, considering the Corticotropin Releasing Hormone (CRH)**

The fatigue that accompanies sport competition is a multifactorial variable related to dehydration, loss of glycogen, muscle damage and mental fatigue. There are several strategies for repairing and recovering the metabolism after intense sport, such as immersion in cold water [3], nutrient intaking, long repairing sleep, stretching, massage stimulation, etc. [27], all of them pursuing to increase the sense of well-being due to sporting. However, fatigue is not perceived the same by different sportsman or sportswoman, depending on their physical preparation, metabolisms, neuromuscular or endocrine specific status [28]. It is interesting to notice fatigue and the feeling of well-being related to sport are very often closely linked each other and, like commonly known by population that happens with the Ying and Yang: they can be present and amplify their own meanings because of the existence of the other (Fig. 3).

A different hypothesis about what is causing the positive relationship between physical exercise and psychological wellbeing is based on attentional strategies: Sport might be a distraction for stressful events [29]. The frequent practice of sports or physical exercises in women

might help them to reduce the discomfort of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) because attention and concentration are focused on a specific sport activity, that requires a high consumption of energy. That focusing might be blurring the attention to menstrual discomfort, becoming less painful [30].



**Fig. 3. Metaphorical explanation about the possible relationship between sportive pain or discomfort and the physical well-being experience after physical exercise training**

Attention is a complex construct that includes many different functions (alerting or vigilance, orienting and executive or conflict control) and also it is monitored by a complex anatomical brain network which includes right frontal, parietal cortex and thalamus [31]. Chang et al. [32] have demonstrated that in basketball players, under a test of a serial stimuli that were congruent or incongruent, the choice for congruent stimuli is improved after an intense exercise session. This way sports might be improving the attentional resources distribution, depending on specific cognitive complexity, intensity of previous exercise and the sort of congruent and incongruent choice [32]. This improvement in attention resources allocation might enable the sportsman/sportswoman to reduce the attention to pain or annoying stimuli during training. However, further evidences do not exist about the preventive effect of depression via physical activity and more research would be required. But difficulties are guaranteed: patients who are already depressed might have very low motivation to practice any type of physical activity or sport, then effects of sport on depressed patients would be very difficult to research.

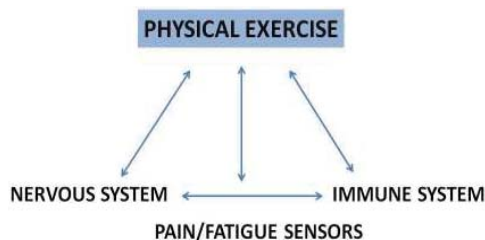
#### 4. THRESHOLD DISCOMFORT MODIFICATION

In marathon runners, pain is a common component in their competitions. Some runners



are able to continue their march in extreme tiredness, pain, adverse weather conditions or even, in extreme cases, with fractures [12,14,33]. Pain tolerance is described as the mean between the maximum and minimum intensity of pain a person can endure in successive trials exposed to a noxious stimuli. Runners in marathon usually have significantly increased their tolerance to pain compared to non-runners. This might be due to the increased release of endogenous endorphins, but could also be due to different strategies for coping with the same stress [33]. However, it is important to notice there is not insensitivity to pain in marathon runners, because it was shown marathon runners were able to discriminate better than control group about painful thermal stimuli [12].

Similar effect has been found in women during consecutive exercises: They induced their hypoalgesia response (that is a decreased sensitivity to painful stimuli causing an increase tolerance to pain) after repeated sport trials of an exhaustive exercise [34]. The moderate to intense practice of physical exercises has been related to an increase for pain tolerance in healthy subjects [35]. While physical activity is happening, the activated muscle requires greater specific metabolic components, which are provided by oxygen and blood circulation (testosterone, endorphin, ACTH) [6,36]. Then those compounds are also logically affecting to other metabolic functions in their way to the muscle [37], such as feelings of wellbeing or euphoria, or those improving mood arousal, self perception and increasing pain tolerance. Interconnected variables might be working together in a synergic mechanism as it is visually explained in Fig. 4.



**Fig. 4. Visual representation of the complex interaction between sports and immune system-nervous system and its relation to perception of pain or fatigue. Bidirectional arrows are expressing the bilateral connection that might exist in between them**

Thus, very valid and healthy options to feel better would be sport training sessions, whatever of

these options: Running, biking, body building, fitness, swimming, boxing, kickboxing, taekwondo, etc. However if you prefer to combine mind and body, Pilates or Yoga, as anaerobic exercises with many benefits [38], can also be of great help for health to find physical and psychological core and balance.

## 5. PROPOSAL OF SOME EXERCISES TO BEGIN

For these reasons exposed above, habitual sport would be very convenient for general body and brain health, increasing smoothly the pace, intensity and frequency of physical activity. For this goal it is not required to practice very high intensity exercise or for quite a long time only once per week, but they might be better practiced routinely, making some activity that involves body movement and muscle activation. For instance, as an example, performing a type of aerobic exercise three times a week (medium intensity exercise for 30 or 40 minutes) might be a good beginning. Another good way for beginners could be walking in a quick pace. These exercises suggested by us, might be of good use as a table exercises example for beginners:

- Jogging or walking fast: 4 x 15-30 minutes (mins.); rest 5 mins.
- Elbow plank: 4 x 15-30 seconds (secs.); rest 120 secs.
- Crunches: 4 x 15-20 repetitions (reps.); rest 120 secs.
- Cross crunches: 4 x 15-20 reps.; rest 120 secs.
- Bicycle crunches: 4 x 15-20 reps.; rest 120 secs.

It is important to notice in each physical exercise, every little aspects are important to consider in order to improve its efficiency and efficacy, such as posture, repetitions (reps.), minutes (mins.) and seconds (secs.). These exercises might be of use for a beginner, however, the recommended procedure and proper personal schedule design have to be done and supervised by an expert, depending on each person requirements or needs, for proper activation of muscle groups, those of interest for the person to be trained.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Physical exercise, as individual or collective sport habit practice, has shown improving welfare for health. These gains are including prevention of

certain mood impairments such as depression, strengthening of the immune system, probably via increasing of endorphin release and reducing stress and pain subjective perception. However, these advantages are only reachable when constancy and habitual sports of certain intensity are performed by the subject in his/her personal and individual path of overcoming. Further research would be necessary.

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### COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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*Peer-review history:*

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# Hoops

Exhibition at The National Building Museum  
Photos by Bill Bamberger

*Hoops was an exhibition that ran at the National Building Museum in Washington DC from March 9 through December 1, 2019.*

Source: <https://www.nbm.org/exhibition/hoops/>

*“I never photographed the players, finding that the “place” spoke loudly about its users. I could easily imagine the players, and in some cases I met them. But more often in the stillness of the court—photographed in early morning or late afternoon light—I came to know a great deal about a community, its character, and values.”*

*—Bill Bamberger*

HOOPS presents a rich and diverse selection of private and community basketball courts from around the nation and across the globe—from the deserts of Arizona to the hills of Appalachia, and from the streets of the Northeast to the playgrounds of South Africa.

Bamberger has taken nearly 22,000 photographs since the series was launched in 2004, and the 75 large-format prints featured in the exhibition are the largest and first comprehensive overview of the work. Early in the project, Bamberger asked his auto mechanic if he played basketball growing up. “He said yes, and took me to the court he played on as a young boy,” says Bamberger. “It was an abandoned barn with fading red paint and a white wooden backboard. It was hauntingly nostalgic, and I thought if I can find such a beautiful court so close to home I can find one almost anywhere.”

Though the specifications for a basketball court and backboard are relatively straightforward, Bamberger’s photographs show us that the permutations are nearly endless. Whether the hoops are nailed to the side of a barn or constructed from repurposed signage and hubcaps, or the courts are fashioned from earth, brick, alleys, or parking lots, these scenes showcase the sport’s enduring and universal appeal. They also allude to the character, friendships, and community that can be forged through the game.





Private residence, Wilmington, North Carolina; 2008.



Stead Park, Washington, D.C.; 2006.





Public school playground, Sedona, Arizona; 2009.



Neighborhood above steel mill,  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; 2006.





Backyard, rural Kentucky 2008.



Retired couple's garage, Franklin, Maine; 2006.



Backyard, Greencastle, Pennsylvania; 2007.



Grain silo, Portland, Oregon; 2007.





Charter school playground, Harlem, New York; 2007.



Abandoned campsite, rural Tennessee; 2008.





City park, Phoenix, Arizona; 2009.



Community playground, North Fork, West Virginia; 2006.

# The Sporting Spirit

By George Orwell

From *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Volume IV: In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950*

Now that the brief visit of the Dynamo football team<sup>1</sup> has come to an end, it is possible to say publicly what many thinking people were saying privately before the Dynamos ever arrived. That is, that sport is an unfailing cause of ill-will, and that if such a visit as this had any effect at all on Anglo-Soviet relations, it could only be to make them slightly worse than before.

Even the newspapers have been unable to conceal the fact that at least two of the four matches played led to much bad feeling. At the Arsenal<sup>2</sup> match, I am told by someone who was there, a British and a Russian player came to blows and the crowd booed the referee. The Glasgow match, someone else informs me, was simply a free-for-all from the start. And then there was the controversy, typical of our nationalistic age, about the composition of the Arsenal team. Was it really an all-England team, as claimed by the Russians, or merely a league team, as claimed by the British? And did the Dynamos end their tour abruptly in order to avoid playing an all-England team? As usual, everyone answers these questions according to his political predilections. Not quite everyone, however. I noted with interest, as an instance of the vicious passions that football provokes, that the sporting correspondent of the russophile *News Chronicle* took the anti-Russian line and maintained that Arsenal was *not* an all-England team. No doubt the controversy will continue to echo for years in the footnotes of history books. Meanwhile the result of the Dynamos' tour, in so far as it has had any result, will have been to create fresh animosity on both sides.

And how could it be otherwise? I am always amazed when I hear people saying that sport creates goodwill between the nations, and that if only the common peoples of the world could meet one another at football or cricket, they would have no inclination to meet on the battlefield. Even if one didn't know from concrete examples (the 1936 Olympic Games, for instance) that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from general principles.

Nearly all the sports practised nowadays are competitive. You play to win, and the game has little meaning unless you do your utmost to win. On the village green, where you pick up sides and no feeling of local patriotism is involved, it is possible to play simply for the fun and exercise: but as soon as the question of prestige arises, as soon as you feel that you and some larger unit will be disgraced if you lose, the most savage combative instincts are aroused. Anyone who has played even in a school football match knows this. At the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare. But the significant thing is not the behaviour of the players but the attitude of the spectators: and, behind the spectators, of the nations who work themselves into furies over these absurd contests, and seriously believe — at any rate for short periods — that running, jumping and kicking a ball are tests of national virtue.

Even a leisurely game like cricket, demanding grace rather than strength, can cause much ill-will, as we saw in the controversy over body-line bowling and over the rough tactics of the Australian team that visited England in 1921. Football, a game in which everyone gets hurt and every nation has its own style of play which seems unfair to foreigners, is far worse. Worst of all is boxing. ... a boxing audience is always disgusting, and the behaviour of the women, in particular, is such that the army, I believe, does not allow them to attend its contests. At any rate, two or three years ago, when Home Guards and regular troops were holding a boxing tournament, I was placed on guard at the door of the hall, with orders to keep the women out.

In England, the obsession with sport is bad enough, but even fiercer passions are aroused in young countries where games playing and nationalism are both recent developments. In countries like India or Burma, it is necessary at football matches to have strong cordons of police to keep the crowd from invading the field. In Burma, I have seen the supporters of one side break through the police and disable the goalkeeper of the opposing side at a critical moment. The first big football match that was played in Spain about fifteen years ago led to an uncontrollable riot. As soon as strong feelings of rivalry are aroused, the notion of playing the game according to the rules always vanishes. People want to see one side on top and the other side humiliated, and they forget that victory gained through cheating or through the intervention of the crowd is meaningless. Even when the spectators don't intervene physically they try to influence the game by cheering their own side and "rattling" opposing players with boos and insults. Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting.

Instead of blah-blahing about the clean, healthy rivalry of the football field and the great part played by the Olympic Games in bringing the nations together, it is more useful to inquire how and why this modern cult of sport arose. Most of the games we now play are of ancient origin, but sport does not seem to have been taken very seriously between Roman times and the nineteenth century. Even in the English public schools the games cult did not start till the later part of the last century. Dr Arnold, generally regarded as the founder of the modern public school, looked on games as simply a waste of time. Then, chiefly in England and the United States, games were built up into a heavily-financed activity, capable of attracting vast crowds and rousing savage passions, and the infection spread from country to country. It is the most violently combative sports, football and boxing, that have spread the widest. There cannot be much doubt that the whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism — that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige. Also, organised games are more likely to flourish in urban communities where the average human being lives a sedentary or at least a confined life, and does not get much opportunity for creative labour. In a rustic community a boy or young man works off a good deal of his surplus energy by walking, swimming, snowballing, climbing trees, riding horses, and by various sports ... such as ferreting for rats. In a big town one must indulge in group activities if one wants an outlet for one's physical strength or for one's sadistic impulses. Games are taken seriously in London and New York, and they were taken seriously in Rome and Byzantium: in the Middle Ages they were played, and probably played with much physical brutality, but they were not mixed up with politics nor a cause of group hatreds.

If you wanted to add to the vast fund of ill-will existing in the world at this moment, you could hardly do it better than by a series of football matches between Jews and Arabs, Germans and Czechs, Indians and British, Russians and Poles, and Italians and Jugoslavs, each match to be watched by a mixed audience of 100,000 spectators. I do not, of course, suggest that sport is one of the main causes of international rivalry; big-scale sport is itself, I think, merely another effect of the causes that have produced nationalism. Still, you do make things worse by sending forth a team of eleven men, labelled as national champions, to do battle against some rival team, and allowing it to be felt on all sides that whichever nation is defeated will “lose face”.

I hope, therefore, that we shan't follow up the visit of the Dynamos by sending a British team to the USSR. If we must do so, then let us send a second-rate team which is sure to be beaten and cannot be claimed to represent Britain as a whole. There are quite enough real causes of trouble already, and we need not add to them by encouraging young men to kick each other on the shins amid the roars of infuriated spectators.

<sup>1</sup> A Moscow football (soccer) team

<sup>2</sup> A London football (soccer) team



THE U.S. OPEN ISSUE

# The Meaning of Serena Williams

On tennis and black excellence.

By Claudia Rankine  
From *The New York Times Magazine*

Aug. 25, 2015

There is no more exuberant winner than Serena Williams. She leaps into the air, she laughs, she grins, she pumps her fist, she points her index finger to the sky, signaling she's No. 1. Her joy is palpable. It brings me to my feet, and I grin right back at her, as if I've won something, too. Perhaps I have.

There is a belief among some African-Americans that to defeat racism, they have to work harder, be smarter, be *better*. Only after they give 150 percent will white Americans recognize black excellence for what it is. But of course, once recognized, black excellence is then supposed to perform with good manners and forgiveness in the face of any racist slights or attacks. Black excellence is not supposed to be emotional as it pulls itself together to win after questionable calls. And in winning, it's not supposed to swagger, to leap and pump its fist, to state boldly, in the words of Kanye West, "That's what it is, black excellence, baby."

Imagine you have won 21 Grand Slam singles titles, with only four losses in your 25 appearances in the finals. Imagine that you've achieved two "Serena Slams" (four consecutive Slams in a row), the first more than 10 years ago and the second this year. A win at this year's U.S. Open would be your fifth and your first calendar-year Grand Slam — a feat last achieved by Steffi Graf in 1988, when you were just 6 years old. This win would also break your tie for the most U.S. Open titles in the Open era, surpassing the legendary Chris Evert, who herself has called you "a phenomenon that once every hundred years comes around." Imagine that you're the player John McEnroe recently described as "the greatest player, I think, that ever lived." Imagine that, despite all this, there were so many bad calls against you, you were given as one reason video replay needed to be used on the courts. Imagine that you have to contend with critiques of your body that perpetuate racist notions that black women are hypermasculine and unattractive. Imagine being asked to comment at a news conference before a tournament because the president of the Russian Tennis Federation, Shamil Tarpishev, has described you and your sister as "brothers" who are "scary" to look at. Imagine.



Serena Williams raising one of her Grand Slam Trophies, from 2013 U.S. Open.  
Credit: Emmanuel Dunand.

The word “win” finds its roots in both joy and grace. Serena’s grace comes because she won’t be forced into stillness; she won’t accept those racist projections onto her body without speaking back; she won’t go gently into the white light of victory. Her excellence doesn’t mask the struggle it takes to achieve each win. For black people, there is an unspoken script that demands the humble absorption of racist assaults, no matter the scale, because whites need to believe that it’s no big deal. But Serena refuses to keep to that script. Somehow, along the way, she made a decision to be excellent while still being Serena. She would feel what she feels in front of everyone, in response to anyone. At Wimbledon this year, for example, in a match against the home favorite Heather Watson, Serena, interrupted during play by the deafening support of Watson, wagged her index finger at the crowd and said, “Don’t try me.” She will tell an audience or an official that they are disrespectful or unjust, whether she says, simply, “No, no, no” or something much more forceful, as happened at the U.S. Open in 2009, when she told the lineswoman, “I swear to God I am [expletive] going to take this [expletive] ball and shove it down your [expletive] throat.” And in doing so, we actually see her. She shows us her joy, her humor and, yes, her rage. She gives us the whole range of what it is to be human, and there are those who can’t bear it, who can’t tolerate the humanity of an ordinary extraordinary person.

In the essay “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” James Baldwin wrote, “our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult — that is, accept it.” To accept the self, its humanity, is to discard the white racist gaze. Serena has freed herself from it. But that doesn’t mean she won’t be emotional or hurt by challenges to her humanity. It doesn’t mean she won’t battle for the right to be excellent. There is nothing wrong with Serena, but surely there is something wrong with the expectation that she be “good” while she is achieving greatness. Why should Serena not respond to racism? In whose world should it be answered with good manners? The notable difference between black excellence and white excellence is white excellence is achieved without having to battle racism. Imagine.

Two years ago, recovering from cancer and to celebrate my 50th birthday, I flew from LAX to J.F.K. during Serena’s semifinal match at the U.S. Open with the hope of seeing her play in the final. I had just passed through a year when so much was out of my control, and Serena epitomized not so much winning as the pure drive to win. I couldn’t quite shake the feeling (I still can’t quite shake it) that my body’s frailty, not the cancer but the depth of my exhaustion, had been brought on in part by the constant onslaught of racism ... The daily grind of being rendered invisible, or being attacked, whether physically or verbally, for being visible, wears a body down. Serena’s strength and focus in the face of the realities we shared oddly consoled me.

That Sunday in Arthur Ashe Stadium at the women’s final, though the crowd generally seemed pro-Serena, the man seated next to me was cheering for the formidable tall blonde Victoria Azarenka. I asked him if he was American. “Yes,” he said.

“We’re at the U.S. Open. Why are you cheering for the player from Belarus?” I asked.

“Oh, I just want the match to be competitive,” he said.

After Serena lost the second set, at the opening of the third, I turned to him again, and asked him, no doubt in my own frustration, why he was still cheering for Azarenka. He didn’t answer, as was his prerogative. By the time it was clear that Serena was likely to win, his seat had been vacated. I had to admit to myself that in those moments I needed her to win, not just in the pure sense of a fan supporting her player, but to prove something that could never be proven, because if black excellence could cure us of anything, black people — or rather this black person — would be free from needing Serena to win.



2014 U.S. Open



2015 Australian Open



2015 French Open



2015 Wimbledon

Credits: Stan Honda; Mal Fairclough; Carlos M. Saavedra; Leon Neal.

**“You don’t understand me,”** Serena Williams said with a hint of impatience in her voice. “I’m just about winning.” She and I were facing each other on a sofa in her West Palm Beach home this July. She looked at me with wariness as if to say, Not you, too. I wanted to talk about the tennis records that she is presently positioned either to tie or to break and had tried more than once to steer the conversation toward them. But she was clear: “It’s not about getting 22 Grand Slams,” she insisted. Before winning a calendar-year Grand Slam and matching Steffi Graf’s record of 22 Slams, Serena would have to win seven matches and defend her U.S. Open title; those were the victories that she was thinking about.

She was wearing an enviable pink jumpsuit with palm trees stamped all over it as if to reflect the trees surrounding her estate. It was ... [an] outfit ... that only someone of her height and figure could rock. She explained to me that she learned not to look ahead too much by looking ahead. As she approached 18 Grand Slam wins in 2014, she said, “I went too crazy. I felt I had to even up with Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova.” Instead, she didn’t make it past the fourth round at the Australian Open, the second at the French Open or the third at Wimbledon. She tried to change her tactics and focused on getting only to the quarterfinals of the U.S. Open. Make it to the second week and see what happens, she thought. “I started thinking like that, and then I got to 19. Actually I got to 21 just like that, so I’m not thinking about 22.” She raised her water bottle to her lips, looking at me over its edge, as if to give me time to think of a different line of questioning.

Three years ago she partnered with the French tennis coach Patrick Mouratoglou, and I’ve wondered if his coaching has been an antidote to negotiating American racism, a dynamic that informed the coaching of her father, Richard Williams. He didn’t want its presence to prevent her and Venus from winning. In his autobiography, “Black and White: The Way I See It,” he describes toughening the girls’ “skin” by bringing “busloads of kids from the local schools into Compton to surround the courts while Venus and Serena practiced. I had the kids call them every curse word in the English language, ... ” he writes. “I paid them to do it and told them to ‘do their worst.’” His focus on racism meant that the sisters were engaged in two battles on and off the court. That level of vigilance, I know from my own life, can drain you. It’s easier to shut up and pretend it’s not happening, as the bitterness and stress build up.

Mouratoglou shifted Serena’s focus to records (even if, as she prepares for a Slam, she says she can’t allow herself to think about them). Perhaps it’s not surprising that she broke her boycott against Indian Wells, where the audience notoriously booed her with racial epithets in 2001, during their partnership. Serena’s decisions now seem directed toward building her legacy. Mouratoglou has insisted that she can get to 24 Grand Slams, which is the most won by a single player — Margaret Court — to date. Serena laughed as she recalled one of her earliest conversations with Mouratoglou. She told him: “I’m cool. I want to play tennis. I hate to lose. I want to win. But I don’t have numbers in my head.” He wouldn’t allow that. “Now we are getting numbers in your head,” he told her.

I asked how winning felt for her. I was imagining winning as a free space, one where the unconscious racist shenanigans of umpires, or the narratives about her body, her “unnatural” power, her perceived crassness no longer mattered. Unless racism destroyed the moment of winning so completely, as it did at Indian Wells, I thought it had to be the rare space free of all the stresses of black life. But Serena made it clear that she doesn’t desire to dissociate from her history and her culture. She understands that even when she’s focused only on winning, she is still representing. “I play for me,” Serena told me, “but I also play and represent something much greater than me. I embrace that. I love that. I want that. So ultimately, when I am out there on the court, I am playing for me.”

Her next possible victory is at the U.S. Open, the major where she has been involved in the most drama — everything from outrageous line calls to probations and fines. Serena admitted to losing her cool in the face of some of what has gone down there. In 2011, for example, a chair umpire, Eva Asderaki, ruled against Serena for yelling “Come on” before a point was completed, and as Serena described it to me, she “clutched her pearls” and told Asderaki not to look at her. But she said in recent years she finally felt embraced by the crowd. “No more incidents?” I asked. Before she could answer, we both laughed, because of course it’s not wholly in her control. Then suddenly Serena stopped. “I don’t want any incidents there,” she said. “But I’m always going to be myself. If anything happens, I’m always going to be myself, true to myself.”

I’m counting on it, I thought. Because just as important to me as her victories is her willingness to be an emotionally complete person while also being black. She wins, yes, but she also loses it. She jokes around, gets angry, is frustrated or joyous, and on and on. She is fearlessly on the side of Serena, in a culture that that has responded to living while black with death.

**This July**, the London School of Marketing (L.S.M.) released its list of the most marketable sports stars, which included only two women in its Top 20: Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams. They were ranked 12th and 20th. Despite decisively trailing Serena on the tennis court (Serena leads in their head-to-head matchups 18-2, and has 21 majors and 247 weeks at No. 1 to Sharapova’s five majors and 21 weeks at number 1), Sharapova has a financial advantage off the court. This month Forbes listed her as the highest-paid female athlete, worth more than \$29 million to Serena’s \$24 million.

When I asked Chris Evert about the L.S.M. list, she said, “I think the corporate world still loves the good-looking blond girls.” It’s a preference Evert benefited from in her own illustrious career. I suggested that this had to do with race. Serena, on occasion, has herself been a blonde. But of course, for millions of consumers, possibly not the right kind of blonde. “Maria was very aware of business and becoming a businesswoman at a much younger stage,” Evert told me, adding, “She works hard.” She also suggested that any demonstration of corporate preference is about a certain “type” of look or image, not whiteness in general. When I asked Evert what she made of Eugenie Bouchard, the tall, blond Canadian who has yet to really distinguish herself in the sport, being named the world’s most marketable athlete by the British magazine SportsPro this spring, she said, with a laugh, “Well, there you have it.” I took her statement to be perhaps a moment of agreement that Serena probably could not work her way to Sharapova’s spot on Forbes’s list.

“If they want to market someone who is white and blond, that’s their choice,” Serena told me when I asked her about her ranking. Her impatience had returned, but I wasn’t sure if it was with me, the list or both. “I have a lot of partners who are very happy to work with me.” JPMorgan Chase, Wilson Sporting Goods, Pepsi and Nike are among the partners she was referring to. “I can’t sit here and say I should be higher on the list because I have won more.” As for Sharapova, her nonrival rival, Serena was diplomatic: “I’m happy for her, because she worked hard, too. There is enough at the table for everyone.”

There is another, perhaps more important, discussion to be had about what it means to be chosen by global corporations. It has to do with who is worthy, who is desirable, who is associated with the good life. As long as the white imagination markets itself by equating whiteness and



blondness with aspirational living, stereotypes will remain fixed in place. Even though Serena is the best, even though she wins more Slams than anyone else, she is only superficially allowed to embody that in our culture, at least the marketable one.

But Serena was less interested in the ramifications involved in being chosen, since she had no power in this arena, and more interested in understanding her role in relation to those who came before her: “We have to be thankful, and we also have to be positive about it so the next black person can be No. 1 on that list,” she told me. “Maybe it was not meant to be me. Maybe it’s meant to be the next person to be amazing, and I’m just opening the door. Zina Garrison, Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe and Venus opened so many doors for me. I’m just opening the next door for the next person.”

I was moved by Serena’s positioning herself in relation to other African-Americans. A crucial component of white privilege is the idea that your accomplishments can be, have been, achieved on your own. The private clubs that housed the tennis courts remained closed to minorities well into the second half of the 20th century. Serena reminded me that in addition to being a phenomenon, she has come out of a long line of African-Americans who battled for the right to be excellent in a such a space that attached its value to its whiteness and worked overtime to keep it segregated.

Serena’s excellence comes with the ability to imagine herself achieving a new kind of history for all of us. As long as she remains healthy, she will most likely tie and eventually pass Graf’s 22 majors, regardless of what happens at the U.S. Open this year. I want Serena to win, but I know better than to think her winning can end something she didn’t start. But Serena is providing a new script, one in which winning doesn’t carry the burden of curing racism, in which we win just to win — knowing that it is simply her excellence, baby.

Correction: Sept. 13, 2015

*An article on Aug. 30 about Serena Williams misidentified the tennis official she confronted at the U.S. Open in 2009 after she was called for a foot fault. The official was a lineswoman, not a chair umpire.*

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## Taking College Esports Seriously

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### Abstract

This study investigated how belonging to a collegiate esports team shaped the identity and experiences of 16 collegiate esports players within a scholarship esports program and student club in North America. Using face-to-face interviews with players, the authors used Stebbins’s (2007) serious leisure perspective to investigate how players increased skill development, formed identifies around their participation in college esports, and found ways to persevere through unique challenges in the collegiate esports space. However, the findings around identify formation, skill development, and perseverance were also contingent upon the novelty of esports as a team-based activity in schools, perceptions of esports as an activity and its associations to gaming culture, and the significant investment in technologies by colleges to create esports programs.

### Keywords

Esports; leisure; videogames; college; students

### The Growth of Collegiate Esports

Videogames played at colleges by students are not a new thing (Dyer-Witthford & de Peuter, 2009). The first videogame tournament ever held was a college affair, when in 1972, students gathered to play *Spacewar* at Stanford University with the winner getting a subscription to Rolling Stone magazine (Baker, 2016). Traditionally, when college students wanted to play videogames against other college students, they formed causal teams to compete against each other (Kow, Young, & Tekinbas, 2014). Today, opportunities to take a more serious orientation towards playing videogames competitively happen in a more structured environment involving student clubs and scholarship-based esports programs.

With much of the focus upon professional esports, less attention has been directed at esports at university and college campuses. At the start of 2017, 40 collegiate esports programs began in North America, with over \$4 million in college funding for esports. A year later, nearly 200 schools have some type of varsity support for esports with \$15 million of scholarships in the collegiate scene (Heilweil, 2019). Robert Morris University (RMU), the University of California at Irvine (UCI), and the University of Utah (UT) all have varsity-based collegiate esports programs. RMU was the first school to offer esports scholarships in 2014 and the first college to

deem esports as a sport in their college. In 2016, an important shift occurred when UCI announced its esports program, making it the first public research university to offer esports scholarships (Szoldra, 2016). The University of Utah started its program in 2017, making it the first university in the Power Five athletic conferences to offer esports scholarships. The connection between traditional athletic conferences and collegiate esports have become an important avenue for gaming developer Riot Games (Riot), for instance, to build relationships with universities as part of their mission to establish esports as a college varsity sport.

Scholarship-based programs provide financial assistance to esports teams through scholarships that can be a few thousand dollars per student each year, to complete full-ride scholarships. Students in clubs, however, also have opportunities to earn prize money through college esports competitions. For instance, Riot held the North American Collegiate Championships (NACC) in 2016 for the *League of Legends* (LoL) game. The competition ended with a match between the University of British Columbia's (UBC) student-led esports club and RMU's esports scholarship team. UBC won \$180,000 for their team in 1<sup>st</sup>-place money. The 2016 win by UBC was a back-to-back win, as they also won the 2015 championship, earning a total of \$360,000 for the UBC team (Meadow, 2016).

With opportunities to earn scholarships and occupy varsity slots on collegiate esports teams, students belonging to university clubs or varsity teams have started to take playing videogames in college seriously. Taking a dedicated turn towards videogames in college exists alongside entrenched public perceptions of harms associated with the use of popular media (Markey & Ferguson, 2017; Screen, 2010). Early academic work on videogames examined the influence gaming plays in the socialization of youth, fostering addictive habits to games, and the exposure to videogame violence (Griffiths, 1999; Selnow, 1984). Decades later, results from videogame research are more positive. Studies indicate that time spent in MMOs allows for the development of team-building skills (Lu, Shen, & Williams, 2014), personal initiative (Adachi & Willoughby, 2013), and the management of feelings of boredom, frustration, and anger (Olson, 2010).

Within the aforementioned context, this paper examines the perspective of college students who were players in either a student-based esports club or in a collegiate esports scholarship team. Specifically, the authors are interested in finding out what a dedicated orientation towards playing videogames looks like. This study addressed how participants saw their gaming within the context of work, play, and leisure. Specifically, the study employed the serious leisure framework (Stebbins, 1982) as committed leisure to examine how players transformed their dedication towards competitively playing videogames in college.

### **The Work of Videogames**

Academic research on play as work in esports has illustrated what a dedicated orientation towards gaming looks like for gamers. Research has explored how dedication towards becoming a better gamer required work that existed outside of being technically proficient at playing videogames. Taylor (2003) wrote early about *EverQuest* "power gamers," finding them to be reflective, goal-oriented, and social. Labor with videogames involves being flexible to changes, open to communication, and a cooperative team member (Rambusch, Jakobsson, & Pargman, 2007; Taylor, Bergstrom, Jenson, & de Castell, 2015). Professionalization in esports requires

skilled players to exert greater effort to master their gameplay (Seo, 2016). As leisure in videogames has translated into work, professionalization has meant players need to be institutionally aware of the industry and the career choices they make. This requires understanding contractual law, knowing what a transition to a different team will mean for a player's career, and being responsible for personal finances in an environment where players can make a lot of money at very young ages (Taylor, 2012). Current research shows that the type of labor associated with dedicated gaming now involves media production in esports and the performance of being a professional player. Streaming has become an important component to esports spectatorship and practices. Because of these changes, streaming of professional esports has added extra layers of performative demands. Johnson and Woodcock (2017) describe the work of professional esports as the “re-aestheticization” of competitive videogame play. Games, such as *Defense of the Ancients 2* (Dota 2), require performative acts through media to make esports understandable to audiences. Taylor (2018) explored how affective labor constitutes a significant part of professional streaming and professional esports work. Not only do players have to consider the work of being technically proficient at competitive gaming, but professional esports players also need to cultivate a media workflow that highlights the players as content producers as well as media personalities.

Where scholarship on esports has started to explore the corrosive effects a work-like orientation can have on gaming, it has also looked at how financial pressures and market-based rationalized play in esports can perpetuate systems of social control, aggressive competition, and destabilizing elements in employment (Brock, 2017; 2018). With the advent of collegiate esports, the community has only started to understand its challenges with regards to issues of work, play, and monetary compensation within the context of colleges and universities. The history of how the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has treated compensation to student-athletes shares similarities with problems raised in the early gaming literature about how play and the labor of gaming can be usurped by third parties for monetary gains and market profit (Kücklich, 2005; Postigo, 2003).

### **The NCAA, Gaming Publishers, and Governance**

Questions have been raised over whether esports fits within what is considered sports (Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Witkowski, 2012). Ever since the first collegiate esports program began in 2014, those same questions were also asked when RMU made esports a varsity college sport. Concerns soon focused upon how esports would be governed as a college sport, with the NCAA possibly playing a regulatory role. The NCAA decided to step back from involving itself in collegiate esports as of April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019 when the NCAA's board of governors voted to table discussions about governance in esports (Hayward, 2019). While the NCAA has been curious about the role collegiate esports could play in updating the image and offerings associated with NCAA athletics, the organization also expressed concerns over the violence present in popular esports titles and the possible problems collegiate esports programs will face with being Title IX compliant (Hollist, 2015).

What specifically complicates the involvement of the NCAA in college esports is the principle of amateurism. To be governed by the NCAA, institutions are required to commit to the principles of amateurism, where “participation should be motivated primarily by education and by the

physical, mental and social benefits to be derived” (2017–2018 NCAA Division I Manual, 2017, p.4). With certain exceptions, students involved in NCAA athletics are disallowed from being remunerated for participation in sporting activities (except for NCAA scholarships). If students violate this rule, they lose their amateur status as student-athletes, their ability to participate in NCAA athletics, and their scholarships.

The entrance of the NCAA into college esports could remove avenues to retain monetary winnings gained through tournaments or online streaming platforms. Previous court cases involving student-athletes and the NCAA highlight the range of control the NCAA exercises over the labor of players, with courts traditionally siding with the NCAA on not compensating students for participating in college sports or allowing students to profit from their associations with collegiate athletics (Crabb, 2017). With new media technologies playing an important role in the lives of students in college sports, legal conflicts continue between student-athletes and the NCAA. For the collegiate esports community, the fear is that the regulatory framework that defines NCAA sports could stifle an emerging culture of collegiate esports.

The decision by the NCAA to remove itself as a governing entity in college esports has created space for publishers to assert an active role in regulating their games in college esports. Soon after the decision by the NCAA to table conservations about governance, Riot created the Riot Scholastic Association of America (RSAA). Taking a student-centered approach to esports, the organization is comprised of various stakeholders in college esports with the “long term commitment to LoL, and it’s development as an inclusive, multi-generational, college and high school sport” (Sherman, 2019). With the NCAA no longer a concern for colleges, the regulatory environment in collegiate esports is undergoing significant changes with publishers having a clearer understanding about the NCAA, amateurism, and the path forward with governance.

### **Serious Leisure**

Stebbins’ (2004) research on serious leisure provides a useful framework to understand the overlapping commonalities between activities regarded as work and play. Conceptualizations of work have framed the activity as being different from activities understood as leisure (Grint, 2005). Some forms of work, however, afford individuals with a self-enriching and fulfilling purpose, in the same way that some leisure activities afford the benefits of self-development and enjoyment. For instance, consulting, skilled-trade, and custom work can generate benefits associated with meaning, such as “success, achievement, freedom of action, individual personality, and activity (being involved in something)” (Stebbins, 2004, p. 2). For Stebbins, serious leisure offers the same type of commitment, meaning, and devotion found in work. Contrasted with casual leisure, serious leisure requires a committed pursuit of an activity that eventuates in the acquisition of skills through perseverance, knowledge of an activity, and a career path marked by turning points. The type of benefits accrued over time include self-actualization, self-enrichment, feelings of accomplishment, a community ethos, and a sense of identity (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014).

Given that the serious leisure framework looks at the dedicated orientation of amateurs, how applicable is the serious leisure perspective when looking at college esports players who receive compensation through scholarships? For Stebbins (1992), conceptually defining “amateur”

meant asking sociological questions, not monetary ones. Pay does not disqualify someone's amateur status. While economic truisms provide context around what it means to be an amateur (i.e., amateurs earn under 50% of their total income through an activity), economic definitions about amateurism are too simplistic of an approach. Rather, the serious leisure perspective defines amateurism by exploring issues around confidence, effort, perseverance, and commitment to an activity.

Larger arguments about whether the centrality of leisure in people's lives fosters a sense of relief and escapism in a modern capitalist society, while important, are beyond the scope of this paper. Relevant questions have been raised over whether serious leisure does cultivate the ideals of "choice," "freedom," and "self-determination" found only in a committed orientation towards leisure (Rojek, 1995). Leisure is not separate from its surrounding context and culture but is largely defined by it. Everyone engaging in leisure is positioned by his or her relationship to resources and wealth that ultimately influences how they enjoy leisure activities (Rojek, 2010).

Stebbins (2007) states that the serious leisure perspective has a "built-in class bias, skewing overall participation towards the more moneyed and educated groups" (p. 62). Because esports is embedded in technology use, differences can emerge between individuals who have access to technologies and those differences can influence how far players can seriously take their leisure activities. Access to technologies and the differences in financial investments from schools is where the serious leisure framework may lack the scope in understanding how people can orient themselves as serious leisure participants. The motivation for using the serious leisure framework comes from exploring the personal efforts (through perseverance, effort, skills, knowledge, a career, and identity) to transform competitive video gameplay into something more serious (Taylor, 2012). With those theoretical limitations in mind, the serious leisure framework can start to offer the conceptual vocabulary to speak about what a serious orientation towards videogames looks like for college esports players.

## Method

This study used in-person, semi-structured interviews with collegiate esports players to explore how players conceptualized their competitive gameplay through the serious leisure framework (Stebbins, 2007). Participants were selected based on their membership in a North American competitive esports team at one of two institutions: a small private university known for its esports scholarship program (Site 1) and a large research university known for its successful, competitive student gaming club (Site 2). The esports program at Site 1 is officially under their college athletics department, with players on their varsity and junior varsity teams given scholarships so long as they maintain a 2.5 GPA. Alternatively, Site 2 was selected based upon the successful standings of its student-led esports club in competitive collegiate tournaments in North America. In 2015, both institutions competed at the NACC for a grand prize of \$180,000 in scholarship money for the winning LoL team. Coaches/coordinators were contacted to help with recruitment at each university. The age range for the interviewees was 18–24 years old, and we sought participants with a diversity of perspectives based on age, ethnicity, and gender. Interviews were conducted on-site at the universities and specifically at the player's choice of a meeting place.



The development of interview questions was guided by Stebbins’ (2007) serious leisure perspective, a framework that classifies leisure activities based on form, intensity, and duration. After each player’s personal gaming history was explored, interviews addressed how players experienced their gaming, how belonging to an esports team has shaped their identity, and how the players experienced gaming within a scholarship-based team or student club. Interviews took place in person at two locations: 1) Site 1’s esports arena located on campus; and 2) Site 2’s “Nest” (student club space), which was in a large student building. Interviews lasted for 45–60 minutes each and were recorded with a digital audio recorder and then transcribed. Summary transcripts were sent to participants to review for accuracy and to provide agency back to the participants in the research. Coding was guided by Stebbins’ serious leisure characteristics (perseverance, effort, career, skills, knowledge, and identity). A thematic analysis of the data was used to arrive at a set of over-arching themes associated with how seriously students were taking their gaming in college.

## Results and Discussion

### *Participants*

A total of 16 players were interviewed. Nine were on esports scholarships at Site 1, and seven were members of an esports student club at Site 2. Table 1 notes players’ affiliation, their preferred game, their status as players, and time of competitive play. Only one player (8) identified as a woman, and three players (7, 11,12) were coaches or directors of teams, as well as players.

Player	University	Game(s)	Player Status	Competitive Play (time)
1	Site 1	LoL	scholarship	5 years
2	Site 1	LoL	scholarship	3 years
3	Site 1	CS:GO	scholarship	2 years
4	Site 1	LoL	scholarship	5 years
5	Site 1	LoL/Dota 2	scholarship	3+ years
6	Site 1	LoL	scholarship	1 year
7	Site 1	LoL/CS:GO	scholarship/ coach CS:GO	2 years
8	Site 1	LoL	scholarship	1 year
9	Site 1	CS:GO	scholarship	1 year
10	Site 2	Dota 2	Captain	3 years
11	Site 2	Hearthstone	captain & director	4 years
12	Site 2	CS:GO	Coach	4 years
13	Site 2	LoL/CS:GO	Club	2+ years
14	Site 2	CS:GO	Club	10 months

15	Site 2	CS:GO	Club	3 years
16	Site 2	Hearthstone	Club	1.5 years

*Table 1: Collegiate esports interviewees*

### ***College Esports as Scheduled Practice and Teamwork***

A crucial component in taking a serious leisure orientation is how much effort and perseverance is directed towards an activity (Stebbins, 2007). At both sites, esports players dedicated time and effort to collegiate esports. When speaking about their commitment to college esports at Site 1, scholarship players referenced how different it was to play under a schedule. A typical “set practice” required Site 1 players to be on campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays. After morning class, Player 1 started streaming from 1:00 to 3:00, with team practice lasting from 3:00 to 8:00 p.m. With intermittent breaks, that is seven hours of gaming-related activities and practice during the weekends, even though weekend practice was technically not required by the program.

Player 2, who was on the substitute team, self-imposed extra practice as part of his efforts to prepare beyond what was required by the program at Site 1. Finding the official schedule insufficient, Player 2 explained, “We practice on Tuesday and Thursday from 6 to 9... me and my team didn't think we were getting the amount of growth that we wanted to see, so we doubled our practice days, so we practice Mondays through Thursdays.” The intense work ethic of the outside world of professional esports can permeate into the culture of younger gamers who may over train, incur physical injuries, or ultimately burnout at young ages (DiFrancisco-Donoghue, Balentine, Schmidt, & Zwibel, 2019). For Player 2, the desire to double his (and the team’s) training was important. While player 2 did not talk about aspiring to get onto the varsity team, the reason for wanting to increase his training was to “to get better at the game, and to be part of a team environment.” Because Site 1 recruited players onto their junior varsity and varsity teams, there was a mix of players from lower as well higher ranks on the team. The collegiate esports program at Site 1 offered players the chance to train with top esports players, and player 2 wanted to take advantage of that unique training environment by training as much as possible.

While consistent schedules were a novel part of collegiate gaming, so was physically being on a team. Player 1 explained the mentality of individual play before joining a collegiate esports program, saying: “When you're playing solo queue, the typical mindset is here's what I want to do, here's the position I want to play...it's never [we] will work together for an objective.” For Player 1, (and Players 2–6), online “solo queue” incentivizes people to be uncooperative and selfish. LoL players have a long history of venting their frustration about having to be matched online into teams with strangers who may have no intent to play as a team and are intensely toxic (Kou & Nardi, 2013). Therefore, the transition to physically being on a team with other players who were committed to maintaining healthy team dynamics represented a significant change in competitive gaming for participants in the study. The popularity of the games *League of Legends*, *Dota 2*, and *CS: GO* at Sites 1 and 2 meant varsity and club players sorted themselves into groups, as all three videogames are team-based. The constant reminder that mainstream collegiate esports is mostly team-based is reflected in Player 7’s comment that “It's definitely different than working on your own. You have to take into thought that you have four other



people around you.” Part of the effort and perseverance of belonging to a collegiate team comes from controlling one’s behavior. The physical proximity players have to each other throughout their day shaped how players felt about confrontation and team etiquette. For instance, if there are problems with teammates, according to Player 1, “It’s like you have to see these guys for the next 30 weeks. You’re living with these people. So, no, you’re not going to cuss them out.” Although problems do surface between teammates, the overriding goal for collegiate esports players is to solve personal frictions with other teammates because ultimately this is the only way to be successful at collegiate esports.

While participants spoke about the effort of being on an esports team, Player 16 provided a different account of team play. An active *Hearthstone* club member at Site 2, Player 16 explained that his challenges with gaming on a team were significant enough for him to abandon the popular esports game LoL. As Player 16 stated, “I found that I could not tolerate incompetent teammates...This is one of the reasons why I started to play *Hearthstone*, because it was a very individual game.” In choosing to play a game that was more “individual,” Player 16 touches on the larger issue of which esports games are considered institutionally attractive for colleges, with certain games counting as “esports.”

At Site 2, several different types of games are represented at the club level. Educators and administrators who see value in collegiate esports through its association with enhanced short-term memory, development of problem-solving skills, increased trust, and greater prosocial behaviors (Freeman & Wohn, 2017; Kyle, Meyer, & Griffiths, 2013; Tobias, Traut-Mattausch, & Osswald, 2012), largely look to team-based esports because of the similarities between team-based esports and traditional college sports. Team-based games such as LoL are very popular at the club and scholarship level of college esports. However, non-team-based games such as *Hearthstone* also enjoy a tremendous amount of support by college gamers. Presently, the educational focus around esports in schools overwhelmingly focuses upon a certain set of esports titles that have attracted greater media visibility (Schwartz, 2018), leaving videogames that do not fit into the mold of mainstream team-based esports out of the discussion. With the growth of collegiate esports (and the repertoire of games offered), students are taking their collegiate esports experiences with non-team-based gaming seriously, but presently non-team-based games lack the visibility of team-based esports. This becomes important to note because non-team-based games, such as the *Super Smash Bros.* franchise, have communities that are regarded as some of the hardest-working, passionate, and diverse gaming communities in esports today (Bailey, 2018).

### ***Community and Identity in Collegiate Esports***

Part of the consequence of taking a serious leisure orientation is forming an identity that is defined by an activity (Stebbins, 2007). For the players at both schools, the negotiation of those identities as collegiate esports gamers varied. Site 1 provided students with significant institutional support, from a dedicated esports arena, scholarships, and jerseys that signaled their identification with the program. Participants at Site 1 noted that gamers fought various stigmas associated with committed gaming, such as social isolation, obesity, or the perception of being “That Guy” gamer who is imagined as having the worst characteristics of the hardcore gamer (homophobic, sexist, or antisocial) (Bergstrom, Fisher, & Jenson, 2016). Coming to a school with a collegiate esports program, however, allowed Player 3 to express his satisfaction with

being accepted as someone interested in esports. As he stated, “I can be myself around these guys...I wear my jersey around, but before, I wouldn’t. I had a competitive COD jersey; I wouldn’t wear it in public. The day I got my [varsity esports] jersey, I wore that when I went to get food.” Interviews with Site 1’s competitive gamers revealed the validation of their identity as gamers from the friends they made, but also from the fact that they were given institutional support for esports from their university. The sense of community described by player 3 aligned with the experiences of other students at Site 1, with college esports players gaining an enhanced self-image and a greater sense of belonging as they committed to their chosen leisure activity (Stebbins, 2007).

Being selected into the first college esports program in the United States was a significant event for players at Site 1. Player 8, being the only woman in the study, expressed how meaningful it was to be a part of her university’s esports program. At first, Player 8 explained how unsure she felt about being on a competitive esports team. After being accepted into the esports program, however, Player 8 explained this was all “a huge confidence boost coming into this.” Player 8 presents an interesting case in the study because she is the first (of two women) to have joined a college esports program in the United States. She was both deeply grateful for the opportunity to belong to the collegiate esports community on her campus, and among all participants, she identified strongly with how seriously she took her role as a scholarship player, saying “How I see it, I should be professional here, this is my job.”

At the same time, Player 8 made it clear that she was willing to pivot from her role as an esports player by participating in collegiate esports in a different capacity. Site 1’s esports program created an eco-system of roles for students to fulfill that were not only geared towards being a competitive player. In her interview, Player 8 was anticipating that she may end up not being the best or most skilled collegiate esports player for the team. However, instead of saying she would stop the program, she imagined herself in alternative roles that included “coaching or organization or team manager.” Similar to the wider gaming culture, college esports suffers from a lack of girls and women participating in the space, with stakeholders arguing that programs need to provide a wider range of activities for marginalized (women, POC, and LGBTQ) groups to interface with (AnyKey, 2016). Even when anticipating that she may end up leaving the team due to unforeseen obstacles, Player 8 continued to look for ways to ground her participation, identity, and commitment into the collegiate esports program in whatever capacity she could.

At Site 2, Players 10, 11, and 12 described being proud of the grassroots gaming club they created at their university. However, for these collegiate gamers, the topic of identity took on a slightly different tone compared to Site 1. Several Site 2 students specifically referred to the prestige of their esports student club as being a point of pride because students often did not find support from the university when it came to the recognition of their achievements. For Player 10, having the student club gaming tag on him, typically on a competition jersey, instilled a sense of confidence. People knew the student club’s name and its reputation. Player 10 said that “When we are playing with the...tag, and a lot of people know the...esports organization, it is kind of a big deal, and then I feel an inflated sense of worth. I kind of feel like... if I were playing for EG [Team Evil Geniuses] for example. You feel good that you are on team EG.”

The sentiments expressed by Player 10 revealed the respect this student has for his university esports club, and the self-worth Player 10 draws from in association with his club was apparent.

The player compared his student team to Team EG, a professional competitive *Dota 2* team that won the world *Dota 2* championships in 2015. Although Site 2 has not received media attention like Site 1, its esports club is respected among the collegiate and professional esports community, even if it was not given institutional recognition by their university.

Although several players spoke openly about their gamer identity as collegiate esports players, Players 15 and 16 at Site 2 offered a different perspective about the public articulation of benefits associated with the self-expression of their gamer identity. A 3rd-year student in the school of medicine, Player 16 was clear about his professional identity, and when speaking about his priorities in college, noted, “For me, it [esports] does not shape my sense of self or identity. Of course, I am proud of the accomplishments I have made, but...I see myself as a future physician, as a researcher, as a good friend to talk to.” While Player 16 is an accomplished player, a well-known quantity in the *Hearthstone* community, and the winner of a notable esports tournament (DreamHack), he wanted to separate his professional self and his activities in esports. While being a gamer in college was a personal passion of his, his future identity as a physician was always privileged and guided how he wanted others to recognize him.

Player 15 explained the difficulties he had in keeping his academic identity separate from his gaming identity. In his first year at Site 2, Player 15 balanced the benefits of college esports with the costs of selectively revealing his identity to classmates. The social and academic world of Player 15 called for a certain type of persona, and it was important to create the right impression at school. As he explained:

I wish I could be public about it, but I can't really, without seeming like I am obsessed, geeky, or whatever. I think a compromise for that would be not only [to be] selective, but probably to do it in moderation and say I play a few games here and there, instead of saying I'm playing on a team, 60 hours a week.

Player 15 was hesitant to speak about his passion for college esports as a student who needed to be aware of how his business classmates perceived him as a future business partner. Also, it was not only being selective about whom he talked to about his collegiate esports, but even when being public about his gaming pursuits, Player 15 crafted his gaming image as not being too serious. This insight offers a counter-perspective from the serious leisure literature, which asserts that serious leisure participants are “proud of what they do, and generalizing from research on the former, they seldom hesitate to talk about it to anyone who will listen” (Stebbins, 2004, p. 77).

The selectivity Player 15 spoke about when he said “The reality of it, it's not by choice, but I have to be selective about how public I am” taps into discussions around the ownership over a gamer identity. Shaw (2013) reported on ways individuals accepted the gamer label by playing a variety of games, purchasing game-related products, socializing with others about games, and dedicating more time than others to gaming. However, her study also showed why the gamer label was carefully embraced depending upon the context. As Shaw argued, “claiming gamer cultural capital, for anyone, has social repercussions. Like other identities, choosing to identify as a member of a particular group affects one's relationship to others” (p. 13).

Player 15 spoke about his dream of being accepted into Site 2 as a student, having spent three years preparing himself academically. Site 2 is a well-recognized public research university in

North America with a large and diverse student body of more than sixty-thousand students. While Player 16 had a clear idea of his professional identity and kept the two identities separated even while committed to gaming, Player 15 was willing to talk about his passion for esports with others but was aware of how his peers could perceive him as a serious gamer. Falsehoods around gaming culture, such as gamers having few social skills and being isolated from the outside world (Kowert, Griffiths, & Oldmeadow, 2012), can prejudice perceptions. The combination of a lack of university support for the esports club, fears of prejudices associated with being too committed to esports, and the overall prestige and reputation of the university where the esports club is located at Site 1 lead some Site 2 players to consider a more nuanced approach to how they revealed their commitment to collegiate esports.

### ***Leveling Up in Collegiate Esports***

A serious leisure pursuit of an activity requires effort over time that marks out a career characterized by periods of development (Stebbins, 2007). In-game rank progression informed the college esports players about what it meant to have a career in collegiate esports, and players understood their careers as markers of achievements in their respective games. The interviewees mentioned certain turning points that demarcate periods of growth. Players referred to their ranks as they spoke about themselves. At Site 1, players of all ranks are recruited into the scholarship esports program, not just elite players. Because Site 1's program includes a diversity of skill levels, several players spoke about skill development when asked about the trajectory of their career in college esports. Player 3 (LoL) spoke of the "severe growth" in his own skills since joining Site 1. Initially, he was only a "Gold 5." After arriving at Site 1 and meeting all his teammates who were Diamond, Master, and Challenger ranks, he wondered "how I got accepted into this." Player 3 (CS: GO) at Site 1 had similar views about an intense leveling-up. Before coming to Site 1, Player 3 characterized himself as an "ok" player. After entering the college esports program, Player 3 said he "gained more ranks there, than I would have with 4 months at home."

In speaking about "effort" as one of the principal characteristics that define a serious leisure orientation, Stebbins (2007) described the characteristic as a personal application of knowledge and skill. Efforts at becoming a better collegiate esports player involve commitment to practicing according to a schedule, learning from other elite collegiate players on the team, and abiding by what coaching and staff recommend to players to stay competitive. However, when Player 3 from Site 1 spoke about his skill development as a college esports player, personal effort and skill development was also contingent upon the technologies the school provided to the students by way of high-end personal gaming computers. For instance, Player 3 explained, "I was playing at 60 hertz at home. That's one of the big reasons why I was at a low skill level. I came here playing on 144 hertz and it was game-changing... pretty much I ranked up all the time here, just because I was playing on that monitor."

Competitive gamers have developed refined sensitivities to how technologies display information that measures in milliseconds (Deleuze, Christiaens, Nuyens, & Billieux, 2017). For Player 3, the gaming monitors purchased by his university, because of their higher refresh rates, were significant enough to have meaningful impacts on his skill development. While personal effort plays a factor in skill development for serious leisure participants, it is important to



acknowledge how non-human, technological artifacts can work together with humans to affect change (Bruno, 2005). In his study of competitive gaming, Taylor (2009) argues that even the less visible technologies around gaming, such as the length of cables and the type of gaming controllers used, can have meaningful impacts on the outcome of competitive play.

When players at Site 1 described the opportunity to practice and train in a dedicated esports arena outfitted with the latest SteelSeries computer peripherals and DXRacer gaming chairs, the gamers were tangentially touching upon the larger topic of how significant investments are being made by colleges and universities in esports infrastructure. Site 1's esports arena houses over a dozen top-end iBuyPower gaming personal computers with Intel i7 Core processors and NVIDIA graphics cards. Schools continue to invest in esports infrastructure, approaching millions of dollars in investments, which can influence how students approach their gaming in a more serious manner. Player 1, for instance, argued that the institutional (and financial) support from his college made a difference in how students saw themselves as players, saying with "the esports arena, we have these awesome computers, so it makes it more like a serious setting. It makes you feel like you're there for a reason."

While Player 3 spoke about the significant benefits afforded to players through the use of high-end gaming computers at his school, it is important to note that all college esports players at Site 1 benefited from a type of technological advantage when Riot moved their LoL servers from Portland to Chicago in 2015, where Site 1 is located. Moving the Riot server to Chicago restructured the technological landscape of collegiate esports. Player 6 at Site 1 elaborated further on the point about how important technologies are to skill development, with improvements to server locations leading to experiences where "we are playing on these super machines, at 9 ping. This is flowing like butter. The game plays itself almost, so it's really nice." The significance of Player 6's comment about ping is about the incredibly low number of 9 milliseconds (ms). The closer a player is to a server, the more responsive (less delay) the gaming experience becomes, with anything in the range of 10 ms being an excellent response time. The comment about how the game almost plays itself speaks to the link between the development of expertise and the role technologies play. Taylor and Elam's (2018) study on how players get better at LoL explored the nexus between the importance of human mechanical skills (timing and precision) coupled with the responsiveness of technologies in creating "expertise as automation" (p. 244). To have that significant of a response time through the school's location to Riot servers was to operate in an environment of such seamless and automatic competitive play that skill development for some of the college esports player was almost assured.

Moving Riot's LoL servers to Chicago reveals that part of the infrastructure of collegiate esports ultimately depends upon the larger corporate rationale of gaming publishers as businesses. The purpose of moving the LoL servers by Riot was to provide a more equitable gaming experience for its player base more centrally located in North America and to even out the disparities on the coastal regions of the United States. However, the movement to Chicago also deeply disadvantages competitive gaming communities that were already on the geographical periphery of Riot's competitive scene. For example, gamers in Hawaii already operate with a handicap due to its location in the Pacific Ocean; moving servers to Chicago created a situation where ping fluctuates as high as 200ms, making it almost impossible for gamers on Riot's geographical competitive margins to be competitive in LoL (Jeffries, 2018). While Stebbins (2007) provides guidance on what a serious orientation towards videogames can look like, the geographies and

technologies of play can interrupt the paths between greater effort, knowledge, experience, and skill development, because so much of collegiate esports is deeply embedded into the technologies and networks of gaming. With the continued development of college esports, digital divides – whether through investments (between collegiate esports programs) or the technological landscape of network transmissions – will continue to be an important issue to address as a way of understanding how students are able to transform their leisure in gaming into something more serious.

### Conclusion

Guided by Stebbins' (2007) serious leisure perspective, the authors examined how 16 collegiate esports players at two North American universities reflected on their experience of team-based collegiate esports, how belonging to a collegiate esports scholarship team or club shaped their identity, and the ways in which skills are developed in the collegiate scene.

While collegiate esports players affirmed Stebbins' serious leisure characteristics, the benefits were contextualized by: 1) the novelty of physically being on a team with other college gamers as being an unfamiliar gaming experience; 2) the careful expression of one's gamer identity for college esports players at Site 2 as a nuanced undertaking about how participants wanted to be seen by peers; and 3) esports skill development as a technological process aided by high-end gaming computers and the advantageous location of gaming servers that allowed for low rates of ping.

This paper contributes to research on player perspectives about digital gaming, work, and leisure. It expands the academic discourse around esports by exploring how college esports players conceptualized gaming as committed and serious leisure. Future research about college esports programs may garner deeper insights into the differences in access to gaming technologies and how that may shape player experiences. In addition, future research could investigate ways public perceptions about gaming and esports may shift how players perceive themselves and their commitment to college esports and their identity as college gamers.

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## PROPER PLACE FOR SPORTS

By Theodore Roosevelt

From *Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children*, 1919.

White House, Oct. 4, 1903.

1

DEAR TED:

In spite of the “Hurry! Hurry!” on the outside of your envelope, I did not like to act until I had consulted Mother and thought the matter over; and to be frank with you, old fellow, I am by no means sure that I am doing right now. If it were not that I feel you will be so bitterly disappointed, I would strongly advocate your acquiescing in the decision to leave you off the second squad this year. I am proud of your pluck, and I greatly admire football—though it was not a game I was ever able to play myself, my qualities resembling Kermit’s rather than yours. But the very things that make it a good game make it a rough game, and there is always the chance of your being laid up. Now, I should not in the least object to your being laid up for a season if you were striving for something worth while, to get on the Groton school team, for instance, or on your class team when you entered Harvard—for of course I don’t think you will have the weight to entitle you to try for the ‘varsity. But I am by no means sure that it is worth your while to run the risk of being laid up for the sake of playing in the second squad when you are a fourth former, instead of when you are a fifth former. I do not know that the risk is balanced by the reward. However, I have told the Rector that as you feel so strongly about it, I think that the chance of your damaging yourself in body is outweighed by the possibility of bitterness of spirit if you could not play. Understand me, I should think mighty little of you if you permitted chagrin to make you bitter on some point where it was evidently right for you to suffer the chagrin. But in this case I am uncertain, and I shall give you the benefit of the doubt. If, however, the coaches at any time come to the conclusion that you ought not to be in the second squad, why you must come off without grumbling.

I am delighted to have you play football. I believe in rough, manly sports. But I do not believe in them if they degenerate into the sole end of any one’s existence. I don’t want you to sacrifice standing well in your studies to any over-athleticism; and I need not tell you that character counts for a great deal more than either intellect or body in winning success in life. Athletic proficiency is a mighty good servant, and like so many other good servants, a mighty bad master. Did you ever read Pliny’s letter to Trajan, in which he speaks of its being advisable to keep the Greeks absorbed in athletics, because it distracted their minds from all serious pursuits, including soldiering, and prevented their ever being dangerous to the Romans? I have not a doubt that the British officers in the Boer War had their efficiency partly reduced because they had sacrificed their legitimate duties to an inordinate and ridiculous love of sports. A man must develop his physical prowess up to a certain point; but after he has reached that point there are other things that count more. In my regiment nine-tenths of the men were better horsemen than I was, and probably two-thirds of them better shots than I was, while on the average they were certainly hardier and more enduring. Yet after I had had them a very short while they all knew, and I knew too, that nobody else could command them as I could. I am glad you should play football; I am glad that you should box; I am glad that you should ride and shoot and walk and row as well as you do. I should be very sorry if you did not do these things. But don’t ever get into the frame of mind which regards these things as constituting the end to which all your energies must be devoted, or even the major portion of your energies.

2

Yes, I am going to speak at Groton on prize day. I felt that while I was President, and while you and Kermit were at Groton I wanted to come up there and see you, and the Rector wished me to speak, and so I am very glad to accept.

3

By the way, I am working hard to get Renown accustomed to automobiles. He is such a handful now when he meets them that I seriously mind encountering them when Mother is along. Of course I do not care if I am alone, or with another man, but I am uneasy all the time when I am out with Mother. Yesterday I tried Bleistein over the hurdles at Chevy Chase. The first one was new, high and stiff, and the old rascal never rose six inches, going slap through it. I took him at it again and he went over all right.

4

I am very busy now, facing the usual endless worry and discouragement, and trying to keep steadily in mind that I must not only be as resolute as Abraham Lincoln in seeking to achieve decent ends, but as patient, as uncomplaining, and as even-tempered in dealing, not only with knaves, but with the well-meaning foolish people, educated and uneducated, who by their unwisdom give the knaves their chance.

5

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