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Book Symposium. Steffen Borge, *The Philosophy of Football*

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ABSTRACT

This is a book symposium on Steffen Borge's *The Philosophy of Football*. It has contributions from William Morgan, Murray Smith and Brian Weatherson with replies from Borge.

KEYWORDS

The Philosophy of Football;
William Morgan; Murray
Smith; Brian Weatherson;
Steffen Borge

Why the Good in Good Sport Is Both an Aesthetic and Ethical Matter

William J. Morgan

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Steffen Borge's new book, *The Philosophy of Football*, is an impressive philosophical account of the world's game in all of its marvelous dimensions. I learned a lot from reading it and digesting its consistently forceful arguments. In this paper, however, I want to focus on his novel *agon* aesthetic take on football aptly named because it isolates its intrinsic competitive character as the source of its aesthetic dramatic appeal. My interest in doing so is not because I find his *agon* approach problematic, quite the contrary, I think it is ideally suited to competitive sports like football, but rather because I want to push his development of it in an ethical direction. Doing so, however, requires that I challenge his important claim that 'The good in ... good sport ... is not a matter of ethics, but of aesthetics' (Borge 2019, 238). I argue, contrarily, that the good in good sport is inescapably both an ethical and an aesthetic matter, that the success of any aesthetic analysis of sport vitally depends on accounting for the ethical considerations that are, in my estimation, an ineliminable feature of such an analysis.¹

I will first sketch out his *agon* aesthetics of football that contends, rightly to my mind, that it is the drama of football that is key to our aesthetic appreciation of it. Next, I will argue generally that unethical offenses that occur on the pitch importantly detract from our aesthetic appreciation of the unfolding drama of the game, and, conversely, that ethical praiseworthy actions on the pitch importantly enhance our aesthetic appreciation of said drama. Lastly, and more specifically, I will argue, contra Borge, that unfair outcomes in football do indeed undermine our aesthetic appreciation of the game.

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I

Borge's main thesis is that an aesthetics of football worthy of the name cannot ignore the ontological status of the sport itself, the fact that football is first and foremost a head-to-head, intimately social, competitive encounter in which how well a team plays depends crucially on how well their opponents play. In Borge's view, football is at its core a contrived conflict, the point and purpose of which is to overcome the unnecessary oppositional challenges it poses. Any proper aesthetic reckoning of football, therefore, must train its gaze on those actions that are intrinsically connected to its internal purpose, more precisely, that are 'conducive to winning the game' (Borge 2019, 224). Accordingly, those actions that are conducive to winning, that 'work in the competitive setting,' are to be adjudged aesthetically meritorious, and those actions that are not conducive to winning, that don't 'work in the competitive setting,' no matter how aesthetically pleasing in their own right, are to be adjudged aesthetically deleterious (Borge 2019, 226). As far as the aesthetics of football go, therefore, everything hangs on the dramatic, back and forth, interactive tensions generated in the course of the game as each side seeks to competitively outdo the other.

It is worth noting here that the scope and relevance of Borge's *agon* aesthetics is not limited to football, but encompasses all those sports that fall under Kupfer's category of 'competitive' sports (e.g. American football, basketball, hockey, baseball, etc.). What these sports share in common, Kupfer tells us, is their oppositional character, the fact that everything that occurs within their confines is to be understood and valued within the framework of competitive play (Kupfer 1988, 460).² That is why, for instance, what appears to be a graceful move in any of these sports is tainted if it misses its target, if it is not conducive to winning. And Kupfer even anticipates Borge's main argument that because these sports are contests, they are 'more like a human drama' (Kupfer 1988, 460). In what follows then, I will frequently recur to this broader category of competitive sports in my exposition and criticism of Borge's *agon* aesthetics.

The name of the game in football and in all of these competitive sports, therefore, is the drama that is their oppositional trademark. Indeed, it is because the *agon* of these sports is specifically designed to elicit such dramatic give and take that Borge claims, 'The prime aesthetic flaw of a football game is ... being boring' (Borge 2019, 209). Being boring, failing to live up to its dramatic, nail-biting potential, is precisely the issue with one-sided contests that pit unevenly matched teams against one another. Such uneven games count as paradigmatic aesthetic failures precisely because their outcome is virtually a foregone conclusion. It is no surprise why the audiences for these lopsided contests fail to get caught up in the actions they put on offer, fail to find them engaging in the least. For the only way to make competitive sports come alive for these audiences, to undo the boredom of one-sided contests, is to honor their integral oppositional character, in other words, to ensure their outcomes are in doubt throughout the course of the game. For that to happen, Borge insists, the actions taken in the game must not only be keyed to winning, but to winning against a team capable of mounting a formidable opposition, of winning the game in its own right (Borge 2019, 223). Everything else about these sports is, by comparison, of secondary aesthetic significance. This explains Borge's agnosticism regarding whether certain offensively or defensively minded playing styles are better aesthetically suited to these competitive sports (Borge 2019, 210). Such questions can yield no satisfactory answer unless they are considered within the framework of competitive play that is the cardinal feature of

football and the like. When they are so considered, we can see why, to give one simple example, there is no aesthetic downside if a team playing a superior offensively skilled opponent adopts a very conservative, defensive game plan to keep the game close. For keeping the game close regardless of the style of play or number of goals scored is essential to ensuring the necessary dramatic back-and-forth tension required to enthrall players and spectators alike.

When we compare Borge's *agon* aesthetic take on competitive sports to its main rivals we can readily see the superior explanatory power of his functional outlook. Borge considers two contending theories in this regard. The first is Kant's disinterested aesthetic view, which requires we put out of mind and sight what is the practical point of the actions that unfold in the game, and instead attend to the aesthetically pleasing perceptual features these actions elicit all by themselves. What aesthetically matters in competitive sports, or anything else for that matter, from this disinterested vantage point, is our direct, unmediated response to what we see that pleases us.³ Disengagement and cool contemplation are for Kantians of this stripe the hallmarks of the aesthetic no matter what objects or actions they attend to. The obvious problem with such a disinterested take on football is that it would enjoin us not to take into account actions that 'work' within the central competitive setting of these sports, that get their dramatic traction and pull from the central oppositional character of these sports. So construed, a shot on goal that massively misses its target can be aesthetically judged as on par or even superior to, depending on its sheer phenomenological appearance, a 'wondrous' goal that finds its intended target (Borge 2019, 227). The other main rival Borge discusses is Gumbrecht's *arete* theory (Gumbrecht 2006), which prizes the excellence and skill of athletic performances over the drama of *agon*. What matters aesthetically about competitive sports on this view is the excellence of athletic performances, how skillful and accomplished such performances are. The more skillful, it argues, the more aesthetically pleasurable it will prove to be for players and spectators alike. But this view, too, Borge maintains, is plagued by the same aesthetic defect as the Kantian view, because it fails to 'calibrate' athletic excellence with regard to the all-important competitive dimension of these sports, with 'how well the teams are matched and how interesting the social drama provided by the match is' (Borge 2019, 242).⁴

That so far Borge has said nothing about how ethical considerations might figure in his account of an aesthetically good, dramatic competitive game isn't surprising, since, as earlier noted, he denied such considerations play any important role in his *agon* account. But that is only the half of it, because he further maintains that ethical concerns can, and often do, detract from and diminish the dramatic aesthetic appeal and appreciation of these sports. As he bluntly puts it, 'a certain amount of healthy unfairness and, perhaps, a dose of unethical conduct add to the spectacle of football' (Borge 2019, 192). The spectators he claims are indifferent to such ethical matters, who more often than not regard them as an aesthetic affront, are what he calls, 'your average football spectator[s]' (Borge 2019, 192), which, he goes on to tell us, consist of informed, 'trained' spectators who are able to get more out of football aesthetically than 'novices' because of their knowledge of the game (Borge 2019, 211). What their greater knowledge of the game gives them, apparently, is an appreciation for how a certain dollop of 'healthy' unfairness can heighten its dramatic tension and excitement. While it is not entirely clear what sort of conduct Borge has in mind by 'healthy unfairness,' one explicit example he gives of such

untoward conduct are contests whose outcomes your average football spectator perceives to be 'unfair' (Borge 2019, 237). And while he is similarly unclear just what 'dose of unethical conduct' he claims is conducive to the drama of football, his following approving quotation of Nick Hornsby's rendition of what qualifies as a 'truly memorable' football game, a genuine spectacle, furnishes a helpful clue mentioning, as it does, not only, '*Outrageously bad refereeing decisions*' (author's emphasis), but, in addition, 'Some kind of "disgraceful incident" ... We are entering doubtful moral territory here ... Yet one has to conclude, regretfully ... that there is nothing like a punch-up to enliven an otherwise dull game ... I am a fan, with no duty to toe the moral line whatsoever' (Borge 2019, 192–3).

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Now one obvious worry raised by Borge's scanting of the ethical in his aesthetic account is the morally troublesome, Hobbesian war-of-all-against-all picture it paints of a sport like football. After all, if, as Borge argues, the drama of football is a beneficiary of 'healthy' unethical conduct (unfair outcomes, and the like) but not of ethical conduct per se (fair outcomes, and the like), then what's to prevent such games from getting completely out of hand, from turning into lurid spectacles rather than taut, nerve-racking competitive affairs. In the absence of any internal ethical counterweight to prevent 'healthy' unethical conduct from morphing into 'unhealthy' ethical conduct, assuming Borge has given us enough to go on to be able even to draw this distinction, there doesn't seem to be anything in his account to serve as a bulwark against such a possibility.

But Borge has a ready and decisive response to this criticism that should allay any worry we might have that his account 'leave[s] us spinning in a morally frictionless void' (Borge 2019, 246). His response is that while an aesthetically good game is not as such an ethically good game, all sports, competitive or not in his sense, are bound by what he calls 'real' ethical values that impose unmistakable external constraints on what it is kosher to do within them (Borge 2019, 246). By 'real' ethical values, he means the ethical values of the ordinary, everyday world, which include such things as personal well-being, health, harm to self and others, racism, sexism, etc. These real values, Borge insists, override all the contrived values of social practices like sport, art, and other kindred cultural fare, practices which are distinguished by their separateness from the realm of everyday life (Borge 2019, 216). So when, for instance, a player is injured, or health is otherwise compromised, or is subject to racial taunts on the pitch, or spectators are crushed to death at a match, or the world at large suffers a great calamity like 9/11, the grip the game has on us must be relinquished for straightforward moral reasons. In all such cases, therefore, 'real' moral values trump sport as well as anything else we human agents occupy ourselves with that are not of the real world.

This is a forceful response that disarms any criticism that Borge's *agon* aesthetics gives ethical carte blanche to players and spectators to act in any way they please so long as it makes the game more exciting.⁵ But if Borge's *agon* aesthetics is not vulnerable to the criticism that it provides no ethical check on what is allowed in competitive sports, it is, I think, vulnerable to the criticism that it glosses over the intra-game, internal ethical considerations that importantly figure in what actions in sport warrant our aesthetic acclaim. This is a relevant criticism because it implicates a central plank of his *agon* aesthetics, namely, that whatever aesthetic value is to be conferred on actions on the pitch is to be conferred in

virtue of their advancement of its main point and purpose, in short, their conduciveness to winning. I want to argue, however, that actions that are conducive to winning have the aesthetic value Borge claims they do if and only if they are ethically above board. Where Borge's account goes wrong in my estimation is failing to see that ethical considerations are themselves intrinsic features of winning rightly understood, that playing competitive sports in a way that does justice to their main competitive point and purpose entails playing them in inescapably ethical ways. I thus second Mumford's claim that sports in general and competitive sports in particular 'might be the best illustration of this close connection between ethics and aesthetics' (Mumford 2012, 68).

If my criticism that Borge failed to see the inseparability of the ethical and the aesthetic in his *agon* account is on target, then his singular focus on winning as the source of its aesthetic value cries out for further analysis. For it would appear that winning has a more complex structure than he gives it credit for. To be sure, Borge does take into account that part of its complexity that Suits brought to our attention in the important distinction he drew between the pre-lusory and the lusory goals of games. What sets these two goals apart from one another, according to Suits, is that the pre-lusory goal is a *disjunctive* goal, in which the specific states of affairs players seek to attain (propelling a ball into a net, crossing the finish line first) can be specified and accomplished independently of the game itself, whereas the lusory goal is a *conjunctive* goal, in which the goal players seek to attain (among other things, kicking the ball into the net, running around the track) cannot be specified or accomplished independently of the game in which it figures (Suits 2014, 38–39). So Borge is mindful of the fact that winning a football game counts as such only if it is achieved in a certain prescribed way, only if the (lusory) means used to achieve it specified in the (lusory) goal are followed. He is thus well aware that outscoring one's opponent in football has no aesthetic credibility if it is achieved by using (illusory) means not allowed by its governing rules, if a team wins by cheating. Cheating has no aesthetic credibility for the same reason it has no ludic credibility, since one cannot play a game well (aesthetically) unless one actually plays it, doesn't cheat, and one can't win a game unless one actually plays it, doesn't cheat.

However, I argue that another important part of the conjunctive character of the lusory goal that Borge glosses over is that playing winning football (i.e. playing it well), which for Borge translates into playing it with the appropriate dramatic flair, entails playing it in distinctly ethical ways that go well beyond the simple formal requirement to follow its rules. For playing football well requires players play it in a way that is true to the ethical respect owed to the game itself: The fact that it is an unnecessary, contrived conflict designed to test our athletic skills and wiles in a manner that befits its competitive purpose. Giving football its ethical due in this regard requires several deontological commitments on the part of players, which are, in turn, integral to spectators' aesthetic response to their actions on the pitch. Spelling out all of these commitments would, of course, require a paper in its own right. But a brief sampling of some of the more salient of these commitments should suffice for my present purposes. Fortunately, much of this work has already been done by Simon (2004, 2018) and Russell (2007, 2011).

A short list of the key deontological commitments that follow from the aesthetic imperative to play football well would surely include a commitment of the players to give the game one's all, to strive in a wholehearted way to win the game (Russell, 2007, 264). In the absence of such whole-hearted striving to competitively outperform the

opposition, the dramatic potential of competitive sports like football is seriously compromised. Playing football well in this competitive sense, as Borge astutely reminds us, involves actions that are instrumentally efficacious, that are conducive to winning, but may be awkward and strained rather than graceful or elegant. But if they are to be instrumentally efficacious, to work in the competitive setting of football and the like, they cannot be half-hearted or lackluster to count as playing well. Surely another deontological commitment of playing football aesthetically, which Borge himself endorses, is playing against formidable opponents who respect the game (Simon 2018, 70). For the quality of play in football is directly related to the quality and intensity of the opposition, to an opposition capable of pushing a team to the outermost limits of its abilities and powers and in so doing ratcheting up the dramatic tension of the contest. Finally for my purposes, a further deontological commitment integral to playing football well is that all competitors should resolve to create conditions that make it possible to perform at their very competitive best. This duty to play well would include a commitment to fair play, to playing football in skillful and strategic ways that befit its overarching competitive purpose, and shunning actions and tactics that are manifestly unsuited to its competitive purpose even if they net attainment of its pre-lusory goal. It would also entail playing according to the ideals of sportsmanship (Simon 2018, 71; Russell 2011, 265).

What the centrality of these various deontological commitments to playing football well shows, I argue, is that the ethical content they convey is 'built in[to]' the game itself (Simon 2018, 70), specifically baked into its lusory goal. That such ethical content is intrinsic to the structural (lusory) goal of football is what distinguishes, as I earlier suggested, the aesthetics of football and its competitive counterparts from the aesthetics of other artistic genres, such as fictional literature and film. For example, the aesthetic value of *King Lear* is not diminished but buttressed by Shakespeare's depiction of Lear as an unsavory ethical character driven by his 'flamboyant egoism', because it takes significant literary skill to transform our natural ethical revulsion at such a 'person' into something aesthetically pleasing" (Gaut 1998, 188). The same cannot be said for football because the mix of skills it calls for is undermined rather than furthered by players' unethical actions because they do not comport with its lusory goal, even though, once again, they may well comport with and net its pre-lusory goal. So Borge may be right that 'a certain amount of healthy unfairness' adds to the spectacle of football, spices up the game, but in my view he is wrong to think it adds aesthetic value to the game given that such unethical conduct is at odds with the (lusory) means, broadly understood to include the deontological commitments previously discussed, necessary to the achievement of its lusory goal. That is to say, there is no comparable skill or move intrinsic to football or for that matter any other sport, as there is in literature and film, that can transform such unethical conduct into something aesthetically pleasing.⁶

A catalogue of unethical actions that despoil the lusory goal of football thereby despoiling its aesthetic allure and significance would surely include the features that Hornsby asserted make football a 'memorable' game', one engaging enough to command the attention and interest of spectators. For relishing 'outrageously bad referring decisions', 'disgraceful incident[s]', and 'punch-ups' might well 'enliven an otherwise dull game', might make it more exciting to watch, but because such actions have nothing important to do with the

kinds of skills, tactics, and commitments intrinsic to football, the ethically bad content they interject into the game can only diminish, if not nullify, its aesthetic appeal to anybody who really knows and cares about football—the very kind of spectators Borge appeals to.

One unethical item that does not appear in Hornsby's recitation of memorable football features, but that belongs, in my view, on any representative list of aesthetically corrosive features, is unfair conduct, which typically is thought to mark the outcomes of games in which it occurs. For example, what might appear at first blush to be a brilliant offensive goal or, conversely, a brilliant defensive stop to a live audience, is immediately revealed to be its unaesthetic opposite if a video replay shows the attacker actually pushed off the defender or the defender actually tripped the attacker. And as we know from the recent baseball fans' moral convulsion over the discovery that the Houston Astros had cheated their way to victory in the World Series by using a camera placed in centerfield to steal the signs of the catcher (which gave their batters a crucial edge over opposing pitchers by tipping them of whether the next pitch was going to be, e.g. a fastball or a curve), such unfair play matters enough to ordinary spectators to elicit their moral indignation. Surprisingly, however, Borge unambiguously rejects the claim that unfair outcomes in sport are to the detriment of its aesthetic appeal. This explains his antipathy to what he dubs enthusiasts of meritocratic-fairness notions of sport. M-F that just as unambiguously decry unfair play. I do not have the space to give the full reply to Borge's controversial claim that it deserves. So I can only briefly point to what I think is mistaken about it.

To see what is problematic about Borge's claim that unfair outcomes in competitive games like football are not a mark against them aesthetically, we first have to see what is his beef against the M-F view that claims the contrary. Fortunately, Borge is quite clear in this respect, complaining that the M-F position is wed to an overly strong account of the 'structural goal' of football, which insists that winning only counts as such if it is achieved fairly (Borge 2019, 238). I am sympathetic to this strand of the M-F account because I too have argued for a similarly strong account of the 'structural goal' of football that contends its realization depends not only on following its rules but honoring as well certain deontological commitments to play it well. But Borge thinks the M-F account is committed to an extraordinarily strong reading of the structural goal of football, one that maintains fair outcomes in football are limited only to those cases in which the best, most talented, teams prevail (Borge 2019, 237). This explains why all of his examples of unfair outcomes in football feature contests in which one team is clearly the best, most talented and skilled team, but ends up losing to a less talented, less skilled team. A case in point is his main example of a game that pitted Liverpool against a 'vastly superior' AC Milan team in the 2005 Champions League final. Milan dominated the first half leading 3 to 0, but in the second half Liverpool mounted a furious offensive attack managing to even the score 3 to 3 in a scant 6 min causing the game to end in a tie, which Liverpool promptly won in the ensuing penalty shootout (Borge 2019, 191–192). To underscore what a miraculous comeback Liverpool was able to pull off, Borge quotes the stunned Diego Maradona: 'I have seen comebacks like that in football but never against a team that so clearly was superior as Milan were' (Borge 2019, 192). Borge opines that the match was 'clearly' unfair according to the M-F account because the dominant Milan team lost. The important point he draws from this unfair outcome, which to his mind confirms his main thesis that ethical evaluation and aesthetic evaluation are two entirely different

modes of evaluating a game like football, is that its unfairness did not prompt the audience to frown upon it, to condemn it, but contrarily to praise it as a great game. To support his claim he once again quotes Maradona 'Liverpool ... proved that football is the most beautiful sport of them all' (Borge 2019, 192).

I do not know of any proponents of the M-F position, however, that would regard this or any other game in which a clearly superior team was defeated by a clearly inferior one as an unfair outcome for the simple reason that there is nothing in their view that exclusively restricts fair outcomes to ones in which the superior team always comes out on top. Rather, their central argument is that fair outcomes are not about the *best* team winning but about the *better* team winning on that particular day in that particular game so long as neither team was unfairly disadvantaged by the other during the game. For it is true of competitive sports in general, as Borge himself has already vouched for, that the quality of the play depends on the quality of the opposition, and that 'superior' teams sometimes play down to 'inferior' ones (or simply have a bad outing) and, conversely, 'inferior teams' sometimes play up to 'superior ones' (or simply have an extraordinary outing). It is thus a theoretical virtue rather than vice of the M-F account of fair play that it is able to account for why audiences of football games like that between Liverpool and AC Milan, in which again the underdog scores an upset, do not reprove but applaud such contests as good, even, great games precisely because the outcome was fair. For there is nothing I can detect in the conceptual arsenal of the M-F take on fair play that commits it either to the counter-intuitive claim that Liverpool's triumph was unfair or that the spectators delight of their defeat of Milan was in spite of its alleged unfairness. Nor is there anything in Borge's retelling of the actions leading up to Liverpool's surprising triumph over AC Milan, aside from the upset itself, that indicates something untoward occurred that defiled the outcome.⁷

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To sum up then, I have argued that Borge's functional *agon* aesthetics of competitive sports like football is a clear advance over rival disinterested and arete accounts. Indeed, the accent his account puts on the dramatic character of these sports goes a long way in restoring their aesthetic bona fides that have been denied them by classic accounts like Best's, who wrongly claimed that because these sports are all about winning they have little to no aesthetic significance to speak of. I have also argued, however, that Borge's *agon* theory needs to be supplemented by an ethical account that takes into consideration the deontological features that intrinsically figure in our aesthetic evaluation of sports of this kind. For I have been at pains to show that what distinguishes the aesthetics of football from the aesthetics of artistic genres like fictional literature and film is its ineliminable ethical dimension, which explains why unethical content in sport, unlike, say, in a novel, defeats its aesthetic purpose and in so doing scuttles its aesthetic appeal. That is why I hold, contra Borge, that the main aesthetic defect of football is not being boring but being unethical. For being boring only counts as an aesthetic defect if it is parasitic on an ethical defect, if it is attributable, among other things, to not giving one's all, not seeking a worthy opponent, not playing fairly. By contrast, a football game that is boring in Hornsby's non-ethical sense, in which the action on the pitch is deemed unexciting because it is absent of 'disgraceful incidents' or punch-ups, is not an aesthetic defect at all,

let alone a major aesthetic defect. That is because there is an important difference between an audience that is moved by and caught up in the dramatic actions on the field in terms of their conduciveness to winning (lusory goal), and an audience that is titillated by the untoward antics of the likes of a Luis Suarez in terms of their conduciveness to being entertained. If I have understood Borge correctly, he, like me, has the former kind of audience in mind, because it is that audience that is most likely to be receptive to what a game like football has to offer aesthetically speaking, and less likely to need to be entertained by a sideshow that the game cannot deliver on its own intrinsic terms.

Notes

1. Cesar Torres (2012) was the first author in the philosophy of sport literature to notice and analyze this connection between the ethical and the aesthetic.
2. Kupfer's characterization of 'competitive sports' as contests that require human opposition is what distinguishes them, on the one hand, from 'individual sports' (track and field, swimming, etc.), which while they typically involve competition do not require it but rather put the accent on measurable athletic performances such as how fast one can run or swim the course, throw the javelin, put the shot, and, on the other hand, 'aesthetic sports' (figure skating, diving, etc.), which while they, too, typically involve competition do not require it, but rather put the accent on the evaluation of how well one skates or dives, on the aesthetics of skating and diving performances that require judges to make qualitative assessments of such performances (Kupfer 1988, 458–460).
3. Vivas's assertion that it is only when he watches the slow-motion replays of hockey games, and, more importantly, only when he 'was not interested in which team won the game' that he derived aesthetic pleasure from the sport, is a good example of a Kantian, disinterested aesthetic position. Quoted in Edgar (Edgar 2015, 164, fn. 1)
4. Gumbrecht's *arete* position is further plagued, as Borge, rightly to my mind, argues because it has no persuasive answer as to why the throngs who flock to competitive sports in which the teams are not the very best, for example, collegiate basketball games as opposed to professional ones, find these less skilled teams as captivating as they do. After all, on the *arete* view spectators are supposedly drawn mainly, if not only, to the most excellent teams.
5. It may, however, be too forceful, because Borge's insistence that any value, aesthetic or otherwise, there might be in playing and watching football in particular and sports in general presupposes that these 'real values [are] secure and unaffected by . . . a sporting event like football' (Borge 2019, 216). This claim is a lot stronger than it might at first seem because it puts in potential ethical jeopardy not just sports but all the things we human agents do outside of our ordinary lives so long as the 'real' values that we owe our primary ethical allegiance to are insecure, are unmet. The likelihood that these 'real' values will ever be really secure now or in the future, however, is the issue given, as Hansen duly notes, 'the practical world is already brimming with injustice,' filled, as it is, with 'undeserved pain and dreadful suffering' (Hansen 1998, 212). Given such injustice and undeserved suffering, could we ever really be justified in indulging our love of playing or watching sport, or, Hansen's target, doing or enjoying art, or partaking of any endeavor that falls outside the realm of the 'real' world, since any such indulgence certainly entails ignoring at least some of our obligations to reduce or eliminate such injustice and undeserved suffering, to securing first these all too real values?
6. Flopping in football, which perhaps comes closest to play-acting of a theatrical nature, is a good example of a 'skillful' unethical action that has no redeeming aesthetic value.
7. In arguing against Borge's supposition that the spectators' regard of Liverpool's unlikely triumph over AC Milan as an instance of a great (dramatic) game was in spite of the unfairness of the result rather than because of its fairness, I am also, of course, arguing against his contention that the conceptual matter of whether the game was unfair or not can be hived

off without distortion from the empirical matter of whether the game was unfair or not from the general perception of the audience. For Borge concedes that conceptually speaking the M-F view might be correct and that the Liverpool's win was indeed a fair one, as I have just argued, which opens the door for the rapprochement of the M-F view and his *agon* view. But he dismisses this concession arguing that he is not making a conceptual point in this and his other examples, but only the empirical point that football audiences regard results like those of the Liverpool victory over the superior AC Milan as an unfair game and one, nonetheless, that counts as a good, even great, game. But again Borge offers no empirical evidence that the spectators of this game found the outcome unfair, only that the outcome was unexpected. What is more, near the end of his book he provides an example of a 2010 World Cup quarter-final game between Uruguay and Ghana in which Uruguay's Luis Suarez used his hand to prevent a potentially game-winning goal by Ghana. This clearly unfair action deprived Ghana of its rightful victory, and as the M-F notion of fair play would lead us to predict, quoting Borge, 'Larger parts of the footballing world howled at the injustice and heaped scorn and moral indignation on the cheating Suarez' (Borge 2019, 247).

Finally, while I have been arguing that Borge misconstrues the M-F take on fair play with regard to the Liverpool vs. AC Milan game, there is something to be said for his account of this game as a trenchant critique of single-elimination, knockout tournaments. For this game as well as the main games he features in the text all were knock out tournament games in which superior teams were upset by less superior ones. And while the outcomes were not unfair, contra Borge, the results were unsatisfactory given the point of such tournaments is to determine which is the best team not the team that is better on that particular day. The problem with such knockout games, then, is that they are not a reliable way to determine the best team, because, unlike league play, they lend themselves more easily to such upsets. To be sure, there are upsets in league play.

However, because the best team in league play is based on comprehensive won-lost records, they can typically survive even more than one upset and still put together the best record. Whereas in knockout tournament play they cannot survive a single upset. This is both a trenchant and timely critique of knockout tournaments because of their fetishization, e.g. in U.S. college basketball, in which the team with the best record at the end of the season still has to prevail in a knockout tournament to claim the league championship.

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The Paradox of Football

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It's Saturday 11 April 2020 – the Easter holiday weekend – and I'm travelling on a train from Nottingham to London. I have a table for four to myself. Indeed I virtually have the entire space to myself – there are two other passengers in the carriage, and the three of us are spaced as far apart within it as is possible. What's going on? Well, it's the coronavirus crisis, stupid. Social distancing and the lockdown are but two of the most visible signs of the new social order into which we have been unceremoniously thrust. In a neighbouring possible world, just like ours but without the covid-19 pandemic, this afternoon's Premier League fixtures will include (already-crowned champions) Liverpool vs. Aston Villa, Southampton vs. Man City, and Wolves vs. Arsenal (all 3pm kick-offs). They won't be happening in our world, of course. Around the globe, sporting events – amateur and professional, from the professional football leagues across Europe to the Olympic Games scheduled for July in Japan – have been suspended in order to help inhibit the spread of the virus.

But it didn't happen overnight. Sports administrators, managers, coaches, players, and fans all wrung their hands for many days, clinging onto to their fixture lists even as it became obvious that an invisible viral tsunami was fast approaching.¹ The chairman of the Australian Rugby League Commission, Peter V'landys, pled for government aid to help the sport through the shutdown period, declaring: 'an Australia without rugby league is not Australia'.² The International Olympic Committee, alongside the Japanese government, dug their heels in for weeks, only belatedly conceding that the Tokyo games would need to be delayed. But the sporting world finally stepped into line and locked down. When the Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta, was diagnosed with covid-19 on 12 March and it became clear that lives were on the line, the whistle was blown on the game and football stadia across the UK fell silent on 13 March.

The coronavirus episode starkly dramatizes a striking and paradoxical feature of sport in general, and football in particular, at the centre of Steffen Borge's penetrating study of the so-called beautiful game: the fact that for all those with a stake in the game, it means everything; and yet at the same time it doesn't really matter at all.³ In the words of Jürgen Klopp, in a message to Liverpool fans on the day the premier league was suspended, 'football always seems the most important of the least important things'.⁴ Call this the *paradox of football*: how can we come to care so much about something that doesn't really matter?

One of the many achievements of Borge's engaging book is to advance a very plausible explanation of these inconsistent attitudes and paradoxical behaviours. Borge builds his case on the phenomenon of play in the animal world, and the closely-related concept of 'proto-pretence', conceived of as a mental mechanism possessed by humans among most

other mammals, and perhaps many other animals in other lineages. Before plunging into the detail of Borge's account of play and proto-pretence, I want to begin by endorsing the broadly naturalistic approach that he takes in *The Philosophy of Football*, irrespective of its precise details. That statement might surprise Borge and some of his readers, given that Borge roundly rejects naturalism. So I had better explain myself.

Football, Naturally

Borge takes naturalism to task on the grounds that it excludes mention of intentional states – states which, according to Borge, we can't do without in a comprehensive account of football. Borge is surely right on this point. Awareness of a practice's 'internal aim', as determined by the 'collective intentionality' of those participating in the practice, 'is crucial to social kinds like football and other sports . . . as this is the ontological arbiter that decides what sort of practice a practice is, i.e. how we individuate different social practices' (Borge 2019, 229). So where is our disagreement? Borge's conception of naturalism derives from the influential mid-twentieth century writings of Quine and Sellars, a descendant of which Borge finds and critically examines in the work of Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson on 'functional beauty'. On this conception, the 'natural' in 'naturalism' excludes anything that is the product of human reasoning or intention; this division is also evident, for example, in the terminology Grice (1957) chooses to distinguish 'natural meaning' (where no agents are involved in the generation of meaning – 'smoke means fire') and 'nonnatural', intentional meaning (as if the mechanics of such meaning are entirely detached from the natural world). Parsons and Carlson expressly say that their aim is to 'turn away from human intention' (73, quoted by Borge 2019, 228), offering a theory of the function, and thus the 'functional beauty', of artefacts which attempts to explain their existence and development independent of the intentions of the makers and users of these artefacts.

This is some elephant to swallow. As Borge notes, it is one thing to acknowledge that there might be non-intentional factors bearing on the historical development of a social practice like football, and quite another to propose that intentionality can be jettisoned altogether. Intentions inevitably creep back into Parsons and Carlson's account via the back door, through their invocations of 'needs' and 'wants' in the 'marketplace' through which artefacts circulate. As Borge sees it, philosophical naturalism constitutes 'the project of denying that a part of the natural world exists' – specifically the part constituted by the intentions, and more generally the minds, of humans (and other animal agents). But I do not think Borge is right to say that we are 'stuck' with this conception of naturalism (note 32, Borge 2019, 252). Why not address the problem through a little conceptual engineering? We need our concepts of 'the natural', 'naturalism', and 'naturalization' to be properly responsive to what we seek to represent and explain through them, and they can be revised to perform these functions more effectively.

What's more, the history of philosophy helps us here, as varieties of philosophical naturalism (whether flying under that name or some other label) both precede and succeed the naturalism of Quine and Sellars. Tamar Gendler, to whom Borge appeals, as we will see, would surely consider herself a naturalistic philosopher of mind. A naturalism

fit for the world of actions and intentions, animals and behaviours, gravity and geology, quarks and queerness, is not only an abstract possibility but a goal many philosophers are pursuing.

Human beings and human behaviour cannot be extracted from and understood without appeal to the natural world – the physically-constituted, biologically-evolved, and (yes!) intentionally-shaped world in which we all find our home. In the age of global warming and covid-19, it ought to be obvious how human behaviour is thoroughly entangled with physical, chemical, and biological processes. (The R_0 or reproductive ratio of an infectious disease arises from the interaction of the biological features of the organism *with* the nature of the social environment in which it spreads.) For physicalists, this is a brute fact. How does Borge's account of football fit into this picture? Consider Borge's treatment of football as a practice depending on the mental mechanism of proto-pretence. Proto-pretence is an attitude attributable to any animal capable of modifying a behaviour such that the behaviour seems inhibited and self-limiting rather than fully committed, as in the context of 'rough-and-tumble' playfighting among mammals, where the biting (and other aggressive gestures) of the animals involved inflicts no serious injuries – and it seems reasonable to infer is not intended to inflict the kind of injury that a real bite in a real fight would be so intended. Proto-pretence differs from fully-fledged pretence in that it does not depend on the 'decentering' of the agent or imaginative transformation of the world through symbolic representation – as in works of art rendered in language, paint, celluloid, or pixels – but more simply on the ability of an agent to engage 'in an activity that the animal is aware of as being non-serious' (Borge 2019, 47) (where 'awareness' is understood in a liberal sense).

The broader point, in relation to naturalism as a philosophical perspective, is that intentionality – and mentality in general – is not the exclusive preserve of humans. No matter how much more sophisticated human cognition might be, relative to the cognition of other animals, it is hard to deny that (many) other animals form desires based on their needs, represent the world, and act purposefully within it on the basis of their desires and representations of (beliefs about) the world. Borge is very clear on this point. Noting that some researchers on play exhibit a behaviouristic 'scepticism about the scientific viability of thinking about systems as having a subjective viewpoint,' he replies: 'The furniture of the world is to be reckoned with and not to be discounted or ignored on the basis of methodological straitjackets when it is reasonable to credit certain nonhuman animals with a subjective viewpoint, given that humans have one' (note 42, Borge 2019, 66). (The mention of behaviourism here is telling – for it is the appropriate target for Borge's concerns about naturalism.)

No doubt language vastly complicates cognition; as we've seen, the difference between pretence and proto-pretence hinges partly on the role of linguistic and other forms of symbolic representation. But language doesn't, and didn't, bring cognition into being. We know this from vast tracts of empirical work in primatology, ethology, zoology, and palaeontology; and the idea of the continuity of species is central to one of the theoretical pillars of modern science, Darwinism. And for any reader baulking at the third of my trio of characteristics of the natural world – that it is shaped by intentions – I would draw their attention to the phenomenon of niche-construction as an important dimension of animal behaviour and evolutionary history. This is the process by which organisms shape their environments through their characteristic behaviours, the results of that

activity then feeding back into the pressures generated by natural selection. Wider reading in the life sciences is probably the best cure for any philosopher afflicted with the zombie idea that cognition, or intentionality, or consciousness, or emotion, are the sole possession of *homo sapiens*.

Borge's compelling explanation of the passionate commitment aroused in us by football, playful apes that we are, alongside our parallel willingness to set it aside in contexts like the covid-19 crisis – the conjunction of attitudes that I am labelling the paradox of football – appeals to two other mental mechanisms alongside proto-pretence: 'aliefs' and the 'fight-or-flight' response.⁵ In many contexts, we behave in ways which point to primitive judgements about the world which are resistant to evidence and reason in a way that contrasts with beliefs. A vivid example provided by Gendler, who hypothesized the existence of such mental states, involves the response of visitors to the Grand Canyon Skywalk as they venture out onto this clear glass platform suspended high above the floor of the great gorge. Few of us can suppress a vertiginous sensation when we perceive ourselves to be stranded high in the air without apparent support – even if we have every reason to believe that we are secure on a robust, fenced platform. Any visit to the top of a skyscraper or cliffs at the seaside can prompt this kind of response; the Skywalk simply purifies the reaction, bestowing rollercoaster intensity upon it. Meanwhile, the well-known 'fight-or-flight' response comes into play when human agents are confronted with scenarios of physical or psychological threat. First theorized by Walter Bradford Cannon, the fight-or-flight response is a state of hyperarousal characterized at the physiological level by the sudden release of a variety of hormones preparing the agent for rapid, strenuous action.⁶ As with aliefs, the fight-or-flight response is an ancient, evolved disposition, common to most animal lineages, the (evolved) logic of which is to pursue survival by fleeing the threat or returning fire.

How do aliefs and the 'fight-or-flight' response come together with proto-pretence and play to make a sport like football possible? Proto-pretence gives us the ability to engage in a competitive, physical contest of a non-serious character. Aliefs explain how it is that, even within such a playful context, we – players and spectators alike – can become aroused and respond with often intense affect to what are intended as (in the technical sense) merely playful gestures. The 'fight-or-flight' response explains specifically how this state of hyperarousal is channelled into the physical contest that a contact sport like football stages.⁷ (Borge's full account, of course, brings still other factors into play: the 'fight' is a ritualised, formalised, and dramatized one, providing scope for the development and display of skill and athleticism specific to the sport.) And so it is that we can collectively exploit our evolved capacities for hyperaroused response to confrontational situations, for rapid affective reactions resistant to rational revision, and for playful, non-serious behaviour, to invent a cultural practice like football. So it is that players and managers and spectators can get extraordinarily wound up by a small group of featherless bipeds chasing a ball up and down a field on a weekend afternoon. It means everything, and yet it means nothing. The paradox of football.

'We Mean It, Man'

To my mind this is a powerful and persuasive account of football, and the best one yet articulated. Borge's exploration of play and proto-pretence, as the evolved capacity through which a cultural practice like football can emerge and develop through history, illuminates an important but poorly understood domain of human behaviour, related to but distinct from fiction and the arts. I want sketch an alternative, though. I do this in part simply in order to discharge my philosophical duty to play devil's advocate, but also in part because there is something counterintuitive about the idea, central to Borge's theory of football, that the sport doesn't really matter, notwithstanding all the Sturm and Drang of those weekend afternoons. That is, the idea that football doesn't really matter remains counterintuitive even when the whole argument is presented. Perhaps that's because of the role of alief within the experience of football; the phenomenological sense that it matters is resistant to rational revision. Perhaps the resistance carries over from the experience to the theory. Or perhaps not. Perhaps there is a sense in which we can defend the idea that football just matters, period.

Set aside the notion of pretence for the moment; let's see how far we can get along in explaining the paradox of football without appeal to it or anything like it. Consider the following case: a father wants to recognise and celebrate his daughter's tenth birthday by taking her to the Harry Potter Theme Park England. But he can't because his mother (the girl's grandmother) falls ill that day and it falls to him to take her to the hospital. Note that although the destination the father and daughter have in mind is a gigantic prop designed to prompt imaginings of the fictional world of Harry Potter, the theme park itself and the trip to it are perfectly real phenomena; they are not fictions. Now in such a case, it's not as if celebrating the daughter's birthday no longer matters at all; it just matters less, or at least is a less urgent priority than getting the girl's grandma to hospital. There is no pretence or proto-pretence involved in the idea that the daughter's birthday matters and should be celebrated, although of course birthdays are 'social facts' which only hold by virtue of the human practices and institutions which bring them into being.⁸

Let's add to this a more radical example to press the point. Imagine that this same little girl gets very distressed by the demise of a fictional character in a story she's reading – let's say the death of Dobby in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Harrows*. Now one of the girl's parents might try to reassure her by reminding her that 'it's just a story' – Dobby is a made-up figure, and no one has really died. But this requires some delicacy. It would be a heartless parent who would say bluntly to the child, 'pull yourself together – it's only a story, Dobby doesn't exist, so his death can't matter'. In a literal sense, of course, this is true; but it's not the whole truth. We don't live in such a one-dimensional, narrowly Gradgrindian world. The more complete and sensitive response would be to recognise that part of what the child is responding to is the fact of death, suffering, cruelty, and injustice in the real world, even as she experiences and perhaps even learns about these things through a fictional world. (The story might, indeed, function as a kind of 'paradigm scenario' whereby young readers learn about real types of emotion by apprehending fictional representations of them.)⁹ The death of Dobby and the upset of a child responding to it matters a great deal less, or has far less of a claim on our time and attention, than many other matters of direct consequence in the real world – like getting someone to

hospital when they need treatment. But even in the case of an out-and-out fiction – let alone the proto-pretend play at stake in a game of football – it seems a mistake to say, baldly, that ‘it doesn’t matter’. Mattering is a relative matter, isn’t it?

Borge would presumably deny this proposal, given the firm line that he draws between the ordinary world and the ‘extra-ordinary’ world of sports and the arts; the line the players cross at Liverpool’s home ground as they pass under the ‘This is Anfield’ sign and out onto the pitch. But there is a theory available which makes sense of the idea that mattering is a matter of degree, rather than something which can be described in binary terms (something matters, or it doesn’t matter, according to whether the mental mechanism of proto-pretence has kicked in). According to the theory of the ‘hierarchy of needs’ propounded by Abraham Maslow, our narrowly physiological needs (for sustenance and shelter) must be met before we are able to focus on securing our need for friendship, love, and community. And these needs must be met before we can become concerned with self-esteem and, at the top of Maslow’s hierarchy, self-actualization. Now, one might argue about many of the details of Maslow’s theory – the particular stages he designates, the degree to which they are separable or overlap with one another, and the variation among cultures and individuals in relation to the hierarchy. But none of these caveats undermine the relevance of the hierarchy for the question of what matters and how things matter to humans, and the way in which a sport like football matters in the sweep of human existence. According to Maslow’s theory, *all of the levels matter* – all of them are ‘needs’ – even if it is true that some the ‘higher’ needs can only come into view once the more basic ones are secured. *Humans cannot flourish if **only** their most basic, physiological needs are met, even if it is also true that they cannot flourish **unless** their most basic physiological needs are met.* Although Maslow did not say a lot about human endeavours like sports and the arts, it is plain that they fit in towards the top of his hierarchy.¹⁰ Such things matter – they are ‘needs’ – but they can only matter when more basic, enabling needs have been met.

With Maslow’s theory in mind, let’s return to our examples from above. A father wanting to treat his daughter for her birthday falls into the middle of Maslow’s hierarchy, as an expression of love (and need for personal attachment). The fact that the need can be trumped by the more basic needs of an equally important loved one – in the example, the father’s mother, who needs hospital treatment – doesn’t make the desire to celebrate the daughter’s birthday, or the disappointment that arises when it can’t be celebrated, a matter of (proto-) pretence. Borge might agree with me so far. But let’s push on: what about the distress the daughter feels at the death of Dobby? The interest of this example is that it isn’t merely a case of proto-pretence, but a paradigm example of fully-fledged pretence or ‘make belief’ in Kendall Walton’s sense (Walton 1990). The daughter make believes that Dobby exists, is loyal to Harry Potter, and is killed by Bellatrix Lestrange. On Walton’s model, her fondness for Dobby and melancholy at his death, though intensely felt, are *quasi-emotions*, since they are responses to *make* beliefs rather than beliefs. In considering this example, then, we have moved from the most ordinary to the most extraordinary phenomena – those involving fictions reliant on pretence – vaulting over the domain of proto-pretence and activities like football. If we can make out the thought that even the daughter’s quasi-emotions matter, that conclusion will surely hold for the case of our footballing passions – since, as Borge stresses, there are no fictional characters or events in football, just real players and real matches.¹¹

As I've already suggested above, I believe we can make sense of the idea that the young girl's sadness at the death of Harry Potter's house elf does matter. It matters because it is part of the child's developing understanding of love, friendship, and loss – an understanding channelled through the attachments we form with individuals, actual *and* fictional. Perhaps it even plays a role in her 'self-actualization', to use Maslow's term – her emerging self-understanding and self-realisation, her growing sense of herself as an agent capable of shaping herself, within limits. As with the planned birthday trip, the experience can be set aside when more pressing and basic needs arise, but for all that the 'merely' pretend, quasi-sadness felt by the daughter still matters. If we reject this conclusion, we will find ourselves in a race to the bottom of what really matters – the end of which can be nothing other than the conclusion that the only thing that really matters, if anything matters, is mere survival.

Moral Sainthood and Sporting Excellence

Let me venture an extension of this argument connecting with the concerns of Susan Wolf's well-known essay 'Moral Saints'. The problem tackled by Wolf might be expressed in these terms: wouldn't a moral saint – an individual for whom every living moment is devoted to the well-being of others – be a crushing bore? That is, such a person might be morally unimpeachable and in that way deeply admirable, but we would find something lacking in them. '[I]f the moral saint is devoting all his time to feeding the hungry or healing the sick or raising money for Oxfam, then necessarily he is not reading Victorian novels, playing the oboe, or improving his backhand' (Wolf 1982, 421). What is it that is absent in the moral saint? It is the recognition of the diverse 'non-moral ideals' which humans value, and the domains in which humans can excel in respect of these ideals. We can also see a connection here with Maslow's theory: the moral saint seems to lack any concern with self-actualization. Wolf continues: 'Although no one of the interests or tastes in the category containing these latter activities [reading fiction, playing music, playing sports] could be claimed to be a necessary element in a life well lived, a life in which *none* of these possible aspects of character are developed may seem to be a life strangely barren' (Wolf 1982, 421).

Sporting excellence, of both the amateur and professional varieties, fits into the picture right here. Wolf not only mentions working on one's backhand as a legitimate way of spending time in a well-rounded life, but also the fact that our paragons include athletes – along with artists and even scholars. Importantly, the sporting excellence that I have in mind is not the abstract 'athleticism' which Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht puts at the heart of football, but the thoroughly contextualised footballing nous of which Borge writes. Such nous conjoins the will-to-win with a knowledge of how to win, within the constraints of the game, and the relevant perceptual, cognitive, and physical skills to channel the will and implement the knowledge. Footballing excellence can come in many varieties, combining an understanding of the game, perceptiveness with regard to the opportunities and threats as a game unfolds (especially as these pertain to the position occupied by a player), and sufficient and specific athletic skills in order to manage the threats and exploit the opportunities. Great footballers – great sportspeople in any given sport – embody a kind of embodied intelligence specific to that sport (and specific to a particular position if it is a team sport where the members of the team occupy different roles). Though very different

in their styles and skillsets, Sergio Busquets, Andrés Iniesta, and Lionel Messi are all great players – as were, in different times and places, Norman Hunter, Bobby Charlton, and George Best; and Tony Adams, Patrick Viera, and Dennis Bergkamp.

So how does all this bear on the question of whether football really matters? My point, following Wolf, is that there is something missing from an ethics which is based solely on morality, narrowly-construed. That is, such an ethics fails to represent the range of endeavours and ideals and achievements which, as a matter of fact, do matter to human beings. I think this point will appeal to Borge, since he strikes a note of scepticism about an aesthetics of football which is, so to speak, abstractly normative – that is, one that seeks to articulate a normative conception of the game which seems entirely out of touch with the game as it is actually conducted, and which appears oblivious to the fact that the game as practiced already embodies a normative conception of the game, and that one might think our primary task as theorists is to describe and explain *that* conception rather than inventing a different one. So what football as we have it does embrace is a commitment to excellence – footballing nous – where the standard of excellence is relative to the level of the game being played (we adjust our standards of excellence, working with different expectations for the Premier League and the East Kent Youth League). And it is this excellence that inhabitants of the footballing world care about. They believe – rather than imagine or pretend – that it matters. That it really matters. Does it matter so much that we should risk the lives of players or spectators to witness such excellence? No. Does it matter so much that we should disregard the racist abuse of players – players who strive to and often succeed in attaining such excellence? No. But is the valuing of such excellence no more than an artefact of play and proto-pretence? No. Do we actually take such excellence to matter? Yes. That is why participants can be so reluctant to suspend the game even when fundamental moral obligations arise. '[T]here seems to be a limit,' writes Wolf, 'to how much morality we can stand' (Wolf 1982, 423). Sporting excellence and achievement is one of those things that fills out the good life beyond the exercise of morality and self-examination. This is the sense in which it (really) matters.

Thesis, Antithesis . . .

So it looks like I've backed myself into a corner: having endorsed and praised Borge's 'proto-pretence' theory of football, I've now raised a significant objection and postulated an alternative account on the basis of that objection. There is something unsatisfactory about the claim that football (and other sports, and all the activities of the extra-ordinary world) 'don't really matter'; we do better to work with a graded account of mattering, acknowledging that a huge array of things (really) matter to us, but they do so in different ways and to different degrees, making demands on us with more or less urgency. Is there a way, though, of reconciling Borge's play-based account of football with this alternative approach to valuing? Is there a synthesis in the offing?

I believe there is, and it is to be found in *how* we conceive of the relationship between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary world. The extra-ordinary world makes the ordinary world tolerable; the extra-ordinary world *penetrates* the ordinary world; it doesn't merely sit outside or on top of it. The activities of the extra-ordinary world are tethered to the ordinary world by ties that run deep into it – think, by way of analogy, of the stakes which hold a hot-air balloon in place, or the gravity that brings it back to earth. This should not

surprise us since play itself, which makes football possible, at once rides on the back of the ordinary world and feeds back into it: the skills we learn and hone in play are real enough, and have cash value in the ordinary world (literally so for professional footballers). The non-moral ideal of footballing excellence is perhaps the most important of these ties between the ordinary world and the extra-ordinary world of football. Just as we value excellence in such fundamental activities as cooking, teaching, and medical care, so we value it in sports and the arts – and perhaps we can savour excellence in extra-ordinary activities all the more because it is freed of its instrumental dimension. Or perhaps it is not so much that we value excellence in extra-ordinary domains more than in the ordinary world, but simply that we can see what it is that we are valuing more clearly.

Important though it is, non-moral excellence is not the only such tie binding the extra-ordinary world to the ordinary world. Our sense of justice plays a role here too. This is not to reject Borge's objections to the 'fair play' conception of football, but rather to modify his 'agon' alternative. It is not as if a sense of justice plays *no* role in the drama of football. Indeed, the drama that often plays out on a Saturday afternoon is one where the forces of justice are pitted against blind chance and the will of the unjust. The team which has prepared best, worked most assiduously, and acquired the right balance of talents through good management does not always win. And so it is in the ordinary world; justice is a frail commodity. In this respect, as much as football allows us an escape into an extra-ordinary world in which special skills can be cultivated, perfected, and put on display for our pleasure, that same world renders in amplified form the vicissitudes of the just in the ordinary world. The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune cut through the world of ordinary action and the extra-ordinary world of football alike.

Notes

1. As Borge points out, the various stakeholders in football don't all share the same set of interests in the sport; most obviously, those who draw a salary from the professional game have a direct material interest in it that most spectators lack. All I assume here, however, is that there is some underlying commitment to the game that is shared by all these parties, a common seed from which fandom and professional involvement may grow. How we characterise and explain that commitment is one of the puzzles tackled by Borge.
2. Quoted in Australian Associated Press [2020](#).
3. Paul Dalglish's (2020) tweet in relation to his father Kenny's diagnosis with covid-19: 'Truly humbling messages from supporters of all teams. I'm sure we can all agree this is more important than football & that we are all united as blues to support the NHS'. The 'blues' here seems to refer to the blue NHS logo, but with a knowing nod to Everton – the 'blues' to the 'reds' of Kenny Dalglish's Liverpool. It's notable here that Dalglish the younger sets aside the partisan rivalry – which sometimes goes hand-in-hand with sectarian enmity – integral to football on Borge's account, as well as signalling more generally that the covid-19 crisis is 'more important than football'.
4. Klopp (2020). Klopp appears to have picked up the phrase (consciously or otherwise), which has been attributed to both Arrigo Sacchi and Carlo Ancelotti.
5. One might add other mental mechanisms or species-typical behaviours here, such as in-/out-group psychology ('tribalism'), which surely underpins the partisan rivalry which Borge regards as central to football.

6. Cannon might be considered one of the unheralded godfathers of the notion of embodied cognition, his book from 1932 being titled *The Wisdom of the Body*. His theory of fight-or-flight was set out in his Cannon (1915).
7. See my remarks on the use of the *haka* in rugby: ‘while ideas of warfare are evoked, in part to arouse powerful emotions and strong commitment on the part of players and spectators alike, only the pathological will take the idea literally’ (Smith 2011, 71). While Borge draws on aesthetic ideas to illuminate sport, in this essay I pursue the complementary strategy – appealing to sporting activities to shed light on aesthetic phenomena.
8. Of course, birthdays are measured out by years, and a year is in one sense a natural phenomenon, measuring the duration of a complete orbit of the Sun by Earth. But a year, and a birthday, are ‘social facts’ in the sense that these temporal phenomena take on the role they have for us because they have been institutionalised by human societies, in the form of calendars and the social rituals which populate them. Here we see again the difficulty of fully disentangling the natural from the cultural.
9. On paradigm scenarios see de Sousa (1987).
10. In his original article (Maslow 1943), Maslow writes of ‘self-actualization’ needs: ‘The specific form that these needs will take will of course vary greatly from person to person. In one individual it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in still another it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions. It is not necessarily a creative urge although in people who have any capacities for creation it will take this form’ (Maslow 1943, 383). In his later book *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow 1954), Maslow writes of ‘ends-in-themselves behavior’ and ‘end experiences’ encompassing sporting and art activities (Maslow 1954, 138).
11. The only thing that Borge ventures is fictional – in a technical sense – in football is the idea that the sport and its constituent matches matter. Given that Borge draws on Walton, although he does not take this step himself, we can think of the passions inspired by football as *proto-quasi-emotions*: like Walton’s affective responses to fiction, they involve some sort of detachment from ordinary world actions and events, but unlike Walton’s states, they do not arise out of fully-fledged pretence and fictional imagining. They depend rather, as we have seen, on proto-pretence. Even so, on Borge’s account, the fiction that football matters is incarnated and sustained by the intense, but nonetheless ‘proto-quasi’, emotions that the game prompts.

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The Sporting Attitude

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Steffen Borge's *The Philosophy of Football* (Borge 2019) is a really great contribution to philosophy of sport. More than that, it shows how questions in metaphysics, aesthetics, and philosophy of mind can be illuminated by looking at them through the perspective of sport. I'm going to focus on one particular question he raises, primarily in chapter 3. What attitude towards a game should players take? What is, to use Suits's terminology (Suits 1978), the lusory attitude that goes along with playing a sport.

There are actually three distinct questions here that are worth separating. I'm going to start with the first, but as we'll see, I'm going to end up having more to say about the second and the third.

- (1) What attitude to the game must players have if they are to play the game?
- (2) What attitude to the game should players have if they are playing the game?
- (3) What attitude must players generally have if the game is to be the game that it is?

Borge argues that Suits's answer to question 1 is much too strong, and I'm mostly inclined to agree. But I think the answers he gives to 2 and 3 are too weak. And thinking about question 2 will help us see why.

To start, let's think about why we might be interested in question one in the first place. Imagine someone, call him George, who stands on a football field, but doesn't act like a footballer. When the ball comes to him, he catches it, or picks it up, and runs towards the opposite goal line. If he makes it there, he places the ball over the goal line in celebration. George isn't playing football—he's playing rugby. (Or, perhaps, he's trying to play rugby and not really succeeding at playing anything, since there clearly isn't a rugby game going on.) Now imagine someone else, call him Webb, who tries to be like George, but fails. He really wants to pick the ball up and run with it. And he tries to do this repeatedly. But he fails every time. He never lays a hand on the ball in fact. Is Webb playing football?

I think he's not, or at least that there is an important sense in which he is not. This is a hard thing to capture. Webb isn't playing football well, since he isn't ever involved with the play. But actually kicking the ball, or even doing any kind of football like move, isn't essential to playing football. (See, for example, some of the less impressive performances of Mesut Özil's Arsenal career.) The problem with Webb is that he's trying to play

a completely distinct game. It was easy to say why George was not playing football; he was gratuitously breaking the rules. But Webb is not breaking the rules. What's wrong with Webb, what makes him a non-footballer, is something mental.

Now at this stage you might be tempted to say that the problem with Webb is that he isn't trying to follow the rules. But, as Borge points out, this can't be the story.¹ A defender who grabs an opponent's jersey—just hard enough to not get penalised—is still playing football. A winger who drags an opponent back to prevent a counterattack—and knows that a yellow card will follow—is still playing football. To use an example we'll come back to a bit, Luis Suárez was playing football when he pulled off that impressive, but totally illegal, save in the 2010 World Cup. You can play football while deliberately, knowingly, breaking the rules of football. So if the problem with Webb is that he has the wrong attitude, what attitude that he lacks must you have to count as a football player?

I'm going to argue that playing a sport requires taking the rules of that sport as providing reasons against certain actions. To play football is, among other things, to regard oneself as having a reason to not handle the ball. (Except as a goalkeeper, or during a throw-in, etc.) This reason can be outweighed, but never defeated. Even if handling the ball is the right thing to do all things considered, one has an outweighed but undefeated reason to not do it. That's the attitude that's essential to playing football. Or, more precisely, playing football requires being part of a game where almost all the players have that attitude almost all the time.

To get to this conclusion, I'm going to start by looking at Suits's view that being a player requires treating the rules as binding; that one is not playing the game if the rules are broken. This requires reconsidering what the rules are, and I'm going to broadly agree with Borge's critique of this reconsideration. Then I'm going to go over my positive view, that being a player requires treating rules as providing reasons. Then I'll compare this view to Borge's view; the views might not be that far apart. And finally I'll talk about how the view of rules as reasons can be strengthened by incorporating D'Agostino's view that games have an ethos, and playing the game requires upholding that ethos.

A simple way to relate rules to player attitudes is to say that playing the game requires treating the rules as binding. On the face of it this is absurd; players commit fouls, even intentional fouls, in every game. A way to make it plausible is to reinterpret the rules so that they are more or less never broken. Now this might seem absurd—a defender grabbing an attacker who is running by is breaking the rules. But as Borge discusses,² you don't have to think about rules this way. You could say the rule is not *Don't grab other players*. Instead, the rule is *If you grab another player then (ceteris paribus), the other team gets a free kick*. The defender isn't breaking that rule. It's true that they do something that leads to the other team being awarded something by the referee. But a defender who kicks the ball into touch to stop an attack also does something that leads to the other team being awarded something by the referee, and they aren't breaking any rules. On this way of thinking, all rules are like the rules about what happens when the ball goes out of play, and players do not deliberately break those rules.

We can put the same point in Kantian terms. We ordinarily think of rules as being categorical imperatives, like *Don't grab other players*, that players break. The view I'm interested in here is that rules are hypothetical imperatives, like *If you grab another player then (ceteris paribus), the other team gets a free kick*. And while these might be broken too,

some fouls are never called, players do not intend to break them. Indeed, it's not clear that a player could intend to break them. The few categorical imperatives there are, like *Don't use a sword while playing football*, are clearly followed by the players.

This is a plausible model for some sports. In particular, it seems like a not absurd model for cricket. At first it might look like cricket has a number of rules for proper bowling, like that you must not overstep the crease when bowling, and you must not straighten your arm when bowling. But on closer look, it is plausible that some of these are hypothetical imperatives. The overstepping rule is really a conditional—if you overstep then the batting team is awarded a run (and some other things). The bowler isn't breaking a rule when they overstep, they are just doing something that results by rule in good results for the other team. In that respect, they are just like a fielder whose overthrow goes to the boundary. On the other hand, the rule about straightening your arm is a categorical imperative: you must not do that. And we can see that from the fact that the match officials' duty is not to penalise this kind of bowling, but to prevent it. So it's plausible that in cricket, most rules should be understood as conditionals, and players intend to conform to them.

But this is not a particularly plausible model for football. We can see this by considering a pair of cases. In each case, an attacker has the ball at the corner flag, and is about to cross to an unmarked teammate near the penalty box. In the first case, defender Ellie prevents the cross by sliding in and cleanly kicking the ball over the goal line. In the second case, attacker Sam, who isn't as good at this, prevents the cross by sliding in and bundling the ball, the attacker, the corner flag and the watching sideline official over the goal line. In both cases, the immediate thing the officials should do is award an unobstructed kick to the attacking team by the corner flag. If rules are hypothetical imperatives, then in an important sense Sam and Ellie did the same thing. They triggered a hypothetical that leads to the other team getting a reward of an unobstructed kick by the corner flag. But surely that leaves something out. What Ellie did was great defending, and what Sam did was foul play. This suggests that we want some notion of rules in which Sam was breaking the rules, and Ellie was not. If the Suitsian model says otherwise, it is wrong. But the Suitsian can't go on to say that what Sam did was against the rules, because then it would imply that being a player means intending to not do what Sam did, and that is clearly wrong.

Borge discusses some examples like this one, and gives two further arguments as to why the view I'm discussing gets the case wrong. I'm sympathetic to Borge's conclusions, but both the arguments seem to need further refinement. And working through is interesting because it reveals how hard it is to put one's finger on what distinguishes the cases.

Borge's first argument³ is that we need to say Sam broke the rules to explain why we added extra penalties in the 1980s and 1990s against this kind of foul play. But I suspect this is easier to explain than Borge thinks. Sports, especially football codes, change rules all the time to discourage behaviour they want to see less of. In Australian football, if a defender carries a ball into their own goal, the other team gets one point, and traditionally the defending team got a goal kick. Since the alternative might be giving up a goal, worth six points, this was often a sensible play. It was so sensible, and became so prevalent, that the rules were changed to discourage it, replacing the goal kick with a jump ball near the goal. The fact that administrators of the game changed the

penalties for certain tackles doesn't show that those tackles were against the rules, it might just show they wanted less of those kinds of things. (Compare this with the change to the rules of football to ban handling back passes.) The fact that Sam might get a red card for this tackle doesn't even show it is against the rules. Dangerous play can get a red card even if it isn't a rule violation. There isn't a rule against kicking the ball hard and straight at an annoying fan pitchside, but it could be a red card if the kick was too hard and straight.

Borge's second argument is that the view I'm imagining is too revisionist. We talk as if there are laws of the game, rules, that Sam broke and Ellie did not. While this is true, I don't think we should be too concerned about this. That's in part because there are sports like cricket where this kind of revisionism seems on reflection plausible. But it is in part because of things internal to football. We talk about tackles like Sam's being against the Laws of the game. But we also talk about being offside as against the Laws. It certainly triggers the exception clause (unless there has been a violation of the Laws) in the clause about a definition of a goal. The story I'm telling seems fine, and perhaps quite plausible, for offside. You can't get carded for repeatedly being offside, even if like Inzaghi you were born in an offside position. If there is a distinction between Sam's case and Ellie's case, it doesn't just feel like we talk as if Sam's action was against the rules (or the Laws), and Ellie's was not.

Still, I think there is a key difference between the cases. I suspect it does cause a problem for this view. Here is one way to see the difference between the cases. Imagine Sam gets away with just a yellow card for her tackle, so both versions of the story continue with the defending team gathering in the penalty box to defend a set piece. In a normal football game, the reactions of the defending team would be different in the two cases. Ellie would be getting fist bumps or other signs of appreciation at a job well done. But it would be very poor form for Sam's teammates to react in the same way. That's true even though doing what Sam did, triggering the condition of a hypothetical imperative, improved her team's position just as much as what Ellie did. Being a football player involves taking a certain attitude towards actions, and that attitude requires distinguishing Sam and Ellie's attitude.

There is a famous real life example of this: Luis Suárez's handball on the goal line against Ghana in the 2010 World Cup. On the rules as hypothetical imperatives model, the rules played out to perfection in this case. A penalty was awarded against Suárez's team, and he was given a red card and a suspension. But this benefited his team, since the penalty was missed, and his team went on to win a game they surely would have lost otherwise. On the view that rules are hypothetical imperatives, then what Suárez did was great football, just like Ellie in the fictional example. But that all seems wrong. A lot of people in the game thought that it was unseemly of Suárez to be so proud of what he did. Yet why shouldn't he have been proud?

Both of these cases can be explained if we understand rules as categorical imperatives, and the players' attitude towards them not as binding constraints, but as providing reasons. Football includes a rule against handling the ball, and a rule against kicking other players. It also provides penalties for breaching these rules. But the force of the rules is not exhausted by penalties. The rules provide reasons that can be outweighed by other considerations, but never defeated. That's why we don't celebrate tackles like Sam's, or

saves like Suárez's. They have done something that may have increased the team's win probability, but which they had reason not to do. And their teammates share those reasons. Celebrating the action is a kind of complicity in wrongdoing.

Borge's view about the lusory attitude is similar to this, but I think a little different. He says that football players have to 'endure, obey or accept the arbitration of the rules of football' (Borge 2019, 150). Or, as he'd put it previously, the players have to 'defer to the referee and ... respect his decisions'.⁴ (I'm simplifying a bit here, not least by blurring the participant/practitioner distinction.)

Now there is an obvious objection to this view. Players clearly do not respect the authority of the referee. It is a commonplace to see them surrounding the referee after an adverse decision complaining about it, and trying to cajole the referee to change their mind. If a defendant in a criminal trial reacted to a judge's verdict this way, they'd be held in contempt of court. It is hard to square respect with contempt.

Borge should, I think, say that respecting the authority of the referee is better understood not in its ordinary usage, but just in the sense that the players do what the referee says. Maybe they complain about the mistaken award of a corner, but they don't just take a goal kick if the referee is unmoved. That's to say, the term 'endure' in the first quote above is important; it's what players most often do.

But even this would be too strong a claim. Let me give just one amusing example. In 2002, I was watching the Germany-Ireland World Cup game in a bar in London. It ended with a stoppage time equaliser by Robbie Keane which brought the house down. But before that the most striking moment was an otherwise routine Ireland free kick. Germany lined up a wall, and the referee clearly said where they were supposed to stand. The camera operator, in a moment of genius, focused on the feet of the German players as the referee walked away. As soon as his back was turned, four pairs of feet started shuffling forward in unison. The bar erupted in laughter. The lesson for us is that the players don't have to respect the referee in the sense of doing what he says, or even endure his decisions; if they can get away with it they will just do something else.

A better idea, not far from Borge's I think, is to say that the players don't have to respect the referee, but they do have to respect the rules of the game. Now this might seem absurd, in light of the examples of gratuitous rule breaking that we've used. But I think we can see why something like it is right if we step away from Germans and Uruguayans at World Cups, and imagine a park game. Thinking about games that are low stakes, and so the incentive to win at all costs is reduced, will help us get a better sense of what's permissible.

Imagine Lisa is playing a game where there is a wall running down one sideline not far from the field of play. At one stage, Lisa is trapped with the ball near that sideline. She realises that a clever little bounce pass to herself off the wall will let her get out of the trap, and she executes it with aplomb. Now this might be a fun thing to do in practice, but it's really not compatible with playing. When she does this, she has to some extent ceased to be a football player, and instead become someone who likes to show off football skills.

Of course, Lisa won't get any advantage from this, because the referee will simply award a throw in to the opposition. At least, the referee will probably do that. But maybe the referee will be unsighted, or incompetent, and will not award the throw. Still, it was wrong for Lisa to do that.

It's part of football that walls are not in play, and being a player requires acting as if that's true. If we imagine an incompetent referee, then we can push intuitions about cases like this even further. Imagine that Lisa goes on to notice that the referee either can't or won't penalise players for using their arms to control passes that come in at chest height. So every time she receives a pass to her chest, she uses her arm to help cushion the ball. The opposition are infuriated, she isn't being subtle about it, but the referee doesn't stop her, so she keeps on doing it, and eventually she gets a goal.

I think she's doing something wrong here, and I suspect, though perhaps cultural norms will vary a bit on this point, that if it is too blatant and the stakes are low enough, her teammates won't be impressed either. They came to play a football game, and she's making a mockery of it. Maybe they won't celebrate the goal she gets by cheating this way, or maybe they will join in the opposition's remonstrance. Why don't they just applaud her contribution to winning? The picture of rules as reasons explains this nicely I think. The rule against handball provides a reason for every player to not handle the ball. Maybe in a game with a huge amount at stake, the stakes override that reason. But in a park game, where the benefit of rule breaking is merely that Lisa gets a bit better control over the ball, that reason should be decisive. To the extent that she doesn't treat it as decisive, she is undermining the sense in which they are playing football. And this can be true even if the referee won't call this kind of foul.

I think, and again I could be wrong, that the players would react very differently to Lisa than they'd react to the kind of ordinary shirt pulling and soft fouling that goes on at most corners. There is something particularly disrespectful about what Lisa is doing that doesn't extend to fouls that everyone does all the time, and this is true even if Lisa would, were the referee to call her for a foul, be willing to shrug and hand the ball to the opposition for a free kick. (And then stand a foot closer than the referee said was allowed.) This is a puzzle, and I am not convinced Borge's theory of what it is to play football can account for it.

The right thing to say here draws on a view of Fred D'Agostino's that Borge discusses.⁵ A sport has an ethos. This can't be derived from the written rules of the game, but is something like the collective spirit in which it is played. In D'Agostino's version, that provides the unbreakable rules of the game. The ethos says that if you do this or this, you're no longer playing the game. This is too strong, as Borge points out. But something like it is right. My preferred version is that the ethos of the game provides the strength of reasons that go along with each rule. Currently the ethos says that shirt tugging at corners is something one has little reason to avoid, handball is something one has strong reason to avoid, and tackles from behind one has stronger reason still to avoid. But these aren't essential to playing football; it was the same game when the strength of reasons were different.

In most cases in football, the strength of reasons is just what you might expect from a minimal familiarity with the game, combined with the fact that player safety is in everyone's interests. But in other sports you need something like an ethos to explain a lot of what we see. In both cricket and baseball, a player on the batting side is out if they hit the ball and it is caught by a fielder before touching the ground. And in both sports there are hard cases where the ball, the fielder, and the ground come together almost simultaneously. But the sports treat these cases very differently. In cricket it is very poor form to appeal for a catch unless you are confident you caught the ball, and if you believe

you did not catch it, you should say so to the officials. In baseball, you appeal for everything and leave it up to the officials to make the decisions. These principles are followed from the lowest levels of the game to the highest. You couldn't derive them from the rules of the game, or from the idea that players should respect the rules and the officials. You need to appeal to something like D'Agostino's idea of ethos to explain the difference between the sports.

But if an ethos is so essential to a sport, does that mean that players in communities with a different ethos are literally playing different games? As Borge points out, this would be an absurd result.⁶ His example involves a World Cup team not used to the stricter refereeing in international games. But you don't need to go that far afield. I've heard that in England it can be a debacle when a Premier League referee takes charge of a Championship game, because the players just one level down are used to getting away with much heavier tackles than a referee who has to look after superstars in the top flight will allow. Now here's the objection. If the ethos is essential to the game, and the ethos is different in the Premiership and the Championship, then it follows they are playing a different sport in the Premiership and the Championship, and that's a *reductio* of the position.

This criticism relies on reading too much into the notion of an ethos. It's true that in a colloquial sense, the game has a different ethos in a place where a certain tackle is commonplace to what it has in a place where that tackle is routinely penalised. But this isn't what D'Agostino meant by 'ethos', and it isn't what I mean. In D'Agostino's version, it concerned what was simply not to be done. The teams who are used to lighter refereeing typically will do things that teams used to stricter refereeing simply won't do. The things they get penalised for all the time are part of the repertoire of the more mannered teams; it's just that those teams don't do them as often. So I'm not sure these are examples of difference in ethos in D'Agostino's sense. And they need not be differences in my sense either. As I'm using the term, the ethos of a game tells you what reasons you have to not do certain actions beyond what penalties will be applied to those actions.

Changing the penalties doesn't even look like something that changes the non-penalty reasons. But the bigger point to make in reply turns on the fact, much stressed by Borge, that football is social. Indeed, it is social twice over. Whether one is playing football at a given moment is a social fact. Whether I am reading a book at a moment is largely up to me. But there is literally nothing I could do right now, sitting at my computer with no one around, that would make it the case that I was playing a game of football. For that I would need teammates, and opponents (and for that matter a field) and none of them are to hand. But that doesn't exhaust how social football is. As Borge argues in chapter two, what makes it the case that various token games are tokens of the kind *football* consists largely of social facts as well. Once we take these things into account, we can see that appeal to something like an ethos of football won't make it the case that people with different attitudes are playing different games.

There is an objection to the whole project of this paper that you might have been considering, and which it is finally time to address. I've been asking what attitude is required to play football. And at some level the answer is that literally anything goes. If there is a field of the right kind, and 22 other people on it—10 of them your teammates, 11 of them opponents, and a referee—and they are doing paradigmatically football type things, then as long as you're in uniform you're playing football. Short of pulling out

a weapon and assaulting people with the weapon, there is little you could do that would count as not playing football, as opposed to playing badly. So how can we talk about the attitude that is necessary for playing football?

Well, we can still talk generically about what the players in general must think and feel in order for there to be a game. Exceptions can be tolerated. It is easy to come up with extreme cases.

Imagine an East German player playing in France in the 1960s, and spending the whole game looking for the safest moment to defect. Or imagine a girl from an area where scouts never venture, finally getting a chance to play in front of a scout, and for this game only caring about how impressive her play is. It will be hard to come up with any plausible story about the attitude of football players that covers their attitudes, yet they are still playing football. But those exceptions can be tolerated, as long as they are exceptions. If everyone is looking for a chance to defect, it isn't really a game, it's an escape attempt. If everyone is just looking to impress the scouts, it's an exhibition or a scrimmage, not a game. What we're after here is what must be true in general.

Because to a pretty close approximation, all it takes to be playing football is to be part of a football game, and being part of it might literally just mean wearing the right kit, and being on the right field. It being a football game is a matter of this game standing in the right social relations to games of football across space and time. Neither requires any player have attitudes of any kind. But we can ask what attitudes, if any, are necessary to be generic across the players in this game for it to stand in the right relations to the class of all football games. We can ask what attitudes, if any, are necessary to be generic across the players in all games if those games are to be, collectively, football.

As with the earlier cases, I think an account in terms of reasons is basically right. What makes the players across all the football games the world over players of the same game? I think it's because they are, generally, taking the rules to provide reasons to act, and not act, in certain ways. There is massive variation within these. At a junior enough level, they are barely cognisant of the rules, and so cannot take them as reasons. At a high enough level, they might be so focused on winning that they care little for the rules beyond the fact that rule violations might lead to penalties. But it would have to be a very jaded team that celebrates Sam just as much as they celebrate Ellie; even at the highest level, players' reactive attitudes tend to generally acknowledge the reason-giving force of the rules.

I'll close by considering two related problems. If the games are associated with the way players take the rules to be reasons, that suggests that games are individuated much too finely. If here we regard the rule against handball as having just this strength as a reason, and over there they regard it as having a little less strength, then are we not both playing football? That would be absurd. If little kids don't understand the rules as having reason-giving force, because perhaps they don't understand the rules at all, are they playing a different game? This seems wrong, since we can talk about someone having played football since they were four.

There are two points to note about 'football' that are relevant to both of these objections. The term is vague. Whether these five year olds kicking a ball around a small field, with no throw ins, goal keepers, headers, or offside rules, are playing football is a bit vague. There is a sense in which they are, and a sense in which they are not. And even given a precisification, the question of whether two people are playing the same sport, or the same game, doesn't always correspond to the meaning of the name of the

game, or games, they play. The same thing happens with language. How widely is English spoken? Do folks speak the same language in Glasgow, Pittsburgh and Sydney? There is a sense in which they are speaking different languages—they certainly have a very different lexicon. But there is a perhaps more important sense in which they are speaking the same language, and that language is English. Is 50-over cricket the same sport, or the same game, as 20-over cricket? There is a sense in which the answer is yes, and a sense in which the answer is no. (I'm actually kind of surprised at how much the infrastructure around cricket supposes the no answer—the games are more similar to each other than either is to junior cricket.) The same happens here. It's true on my view that there is a sense in which players who differ in what strength they give to the rules of football are playing different games, just like 50-over and 20-over cricket might be different games. But just like those are both games of cricket, and like the folks in Glasgow, Pittsburgh and Sydney are all speaking English, the players might all be playing football.

While I've disagreed, at least on points of emphasis, with Borge, I want to close by expressing again my appreciation for his book. Philosophy is richer when it engages with real life, especially with those aspects of real life that make less sense the more you think about them. And his book is a great example of this kind of engagement, and is rewarding reading for anyone who cares about either football or philosophy, and especially for those of us who care about both.

Notes

1. See the 'Fistful of Fouls' example on page 139 in Borge 2019.
2. See the ideas for how to flesh out a Suitsian view on pages 154ff in Borge 2019.
3. Again, I'm focussing on the discussion on pages 143ff in Borge 2019.
4. Borge 2010, 164, as cited on page 150 in Borge 2019.
5. See D'Agostino (1981) for the original, and pages 144–148 of Borge's 2019 book for the discussion.
6. I'm drawing here on his discussion of Ghafoor Jahani at the 1978 World Cup, on page 148 in Borge 2019.

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The Philosophy of Football. Replies to William Morgan, Murray Smith and Brian Weatherson

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1. Introduction

To be given the opportunity to return to some of the themes addressed in *The Philosophy of Football* in light of the comments and critique offered by William Morgan, Murray Smith and Brian Weatherson for this symposium is a rare gift, and I hope my answers meet the standard set by them. I will address each of them in the order mentioned above and show how the theories of sport, football and other related topics found in the book enable us to deal with their objections.

2. Philosophy of Sport and the Ethical Straitjacket. Reply to Morgan

2.1. Understanding the Beastly Fury

In *The Philosophy of Football*, I tried to free philosophy of sport from the yoke of the ethical straitjacket that restrains the discipline. Takes on issues in the philosophy of sport often involve lofty idealizations, while the realities of sport, warts and all, are ignored. Especially association football stands out as not fitting the ethical mould. My *agon aesthetics* sets out to explain what goes on in constructive-destructive sports like football without being impeded by the ethical straitjacket's restraints on thought. William Morgan compliments my *agon aesthetics* as being 'ideally suited to competitive sports like football', yet he wants us back in the ethical straitjacket or, as he puts it, 'I want to push his development of it [agon aesthetics] in an ethical direction' (Morgan 2022).¹ I will resist the invitation.

On the reality side of things, we have actual football matches and their audiences. What goes on there is quite often far removed from what polite society would approve of. Morgan is sceptical about my appeal to the average football spectator, as though he cannot bring himself to believe what he is reading. This incredulousness causes Morgan to return to a Nick Hornby quote several times in his comments, but he misunderstands the dialectics of the quote in the book (Borge 2019a, 192–193). The quote is there merely to show that there is nothing idiosyncratic about my presentation of the football phenomenon as something where ethics does not take centre stage. After all, *Fever Pitch* sold millions of copies and became something of a cultural phenomenon, and so when Hornby includes the line 'I am a fan, with no duty to toe the moral line whatsoever', philosophers of sport would do well to sit up and take notice (Hornby 1992, 237).

However, if Morgan needed a short programmatic statement about the aesthetics of football, I write that 'football can exhibit all sorts of aesthetic qualities from beauty to ugliness; the sport can sometimes be downright disgusting' and that '[i]t is a multifaceted spectacle that outruns any ethical theory I have seen on the market' (Borge 2019a, 69, 247). My view on football, in particular, and sport, in general, is not captured along a simple minded either-or line of the ethical/fair versus immoral or amoral/unfair. Sport outruns the ethical theories on the market simply because those theories were not

developed with sport in mind, but for ordinary, everyday situations. When ethical theories are applied to what goes on in sport, they obstruct understanding and function as an ethical straitjacket. When Morgan worries that my position gives a ‘Hobbesian war-of-all picture’ of sport, he is in the wrong shooting range (Morgan 2022). This is football. It is a sport. It is not forced upon us as something we must deal with as part of our ordinary, everyday life. We decide to play and watch it. If a sport does not sit well with you – perhaps it is too harsh (violent, unethical, too many unfair results, etc.) or too kind (peaceful, ethical, too few unfair results, etc.) – then you can walk away. Morgan worries that my theory does not have the resources ‘to prevent such games from getting completely out of hand, from turning into lurid spectacles’ (Morgan 2022). Certainly, some might want to police people and prevent them from participating in what they regard as lurid spectacles – in 1573 a precursor to association football was described in writing as a ‘beastly fury’ – but as philosophers, I suggest that we also try to make sense of the phenomenon at hand (Borge 2019a, 94). Understanding the beastly fury is the aim of my book.

Morgan’s reaction to the above-mentioned Hornby quote is telling. Instead of trying to figure out what makes the spectator clock tick for a football supporter like Hornby, Morgan scolds Hornby and tells him that *au contraire*, ‘a football game that is boring in Hornby’s non-ethical sense (...) is not an aesthetic defect at all’ (Morgan 2022). This is a strict headmaster’s reaction to an unruly student, where the headmaster simply denies the existence or validity of the student’s experience and reinstates the headmaster’s own view on the matter without any further fuss. The ingredients that Hornby lists as needed for a truly memorable match are misguided because ‘the ethically bad content they interject into the game can only diminish, if not nullify, its aesthetic appeal to anyone who *really knows and cares* about football’ (Morgan 2022, my italics). Hornby is wrong about what makes football attractive to him or, perhaps more accurately, if he really cared about football, he would see the error of his ways. Here Morgan and I differ. I want to understand the phenomenon at hand as I have found it past and present, and that is what I have tried to do in the book.

2.2. Sport without Baroque Interpretations

Whereas I claim that ‘[t]he good in a good sport (...) is not a matter of ethics, but of aesthetics’, Morgan tells us that ‘the good in good sport is inescapably both an ethical and an aesthetic matter’ (Borge 2019a, 238, Morgan 2022).

[T]he success of any aesthetic analysis of sport vitally depends on accounting for the ethical considerations that are (...) an ineliminable feature of such an analysis (Morgan 2022).

If I am correct in assuming no symmetry here, then the notion that the aesthetic depends on the ethical, but not the other way around, in effect subsumes the aesthetic under the ethical. This is no surprise, as such is the way of the ethical straitjacket.

This indicates that Morgan relies on Bernard Suits’ incompatibility thesis and in what looks like a *Hornby moment*, Morgan reprimands me for what I, contrary to what I write, *really* mean.

Borge is *mindful* of the fact that winning a football game counts as such only if it is achieved in a certain prescribed way, only if the (lusory) means used to achieve it specified in the (lusory) goal are followed. He is thus *well aware* that outscoring one's opponent in football has no aesthetic credibility if it is achieved by using (illusory) means not allowed by its governing rules, if a team wins by cheating. Cheating has no aesthetic credibility for the same reason it has no ludic credibility, since one cannot play a game well (aesthetically) unless one *actually plays it, doesn't cheat*, and one can't win a game unless one *actually plays it, doesn't cheat* (Morgan 2022).

I am neither mindful nor well aware of any such thing. To be mindful or well aware of that would be to give my assent to Suits' incompatibility thesis, which states that it is 'impossible for me to win the game and at the same time to break one of its rules' and that 'one cannot (*really*) win the game unless one plays it, and one cannot (*really*) play the game unless one obeys the rules of the game', but I reject this thesis (Suits 1978, 40, 39, my italics). However, Suits' incompatibility thesis with regard to football can be defended if one adopts an error view of the sport (Borge 2019a, 140–144). One such error view would be that, unbeknownst to both players and spectators, footballers *qua* footballers pop in and out of existence, because when they break the rules of the sport they stop being footballers, i.e. stop playing football.

This will also be reflected in the match results. If a goal in a match was assisted or scored by a player or players that in fact at that point were not playing football because they had committed a foul somewhere in the build up or, at some earlier point in the match, then that would render impossible achieving the end of scoring a goal in that match at that point. Thus players and spectators are also in error about some, many or most of the results of football matches. The problems facing this theory are daunting. For example, when does a player who has broken a rule of the sport, i.e. is not *really* playing football, remerge into the game as someone who again is *really* playing football? This baroque explanation of football with its outlandish metaphysics should be dismissed together with the other error views considered in the book.

Another line of defence for a Suitsian incompatibility thesis is to argue that the acts of rule-breaking we find in football – like tripping, hacking, handballing, shirt tugging, etc. – are mere violations of regulative rules of the sport, not constitutive rules. Only violations of the latter *ipso facto* cause you to cease to be someone who is *really* part of the sport. However, *history teaches us otherwise*. I address this *it's-only-regulative-rules* move and show that the rules prohibiting handling the ball for outfield players and hacking clearly are constitutive rules (Borge 2019a, 180–186). When discussing what kind of social kind sport and football is, I argue that, with regard to football, we should recognize three stages of development of the sport, from folk football through proto football, which then fissioned into association football and rugby football (Borge 2019a, 83–100). The bones of contention at the crossroad for association football and rugby football were whether '[r]unning with the ball in the hands would be allowed and hacking would be legal' (Collins 2017, 33). At its fifth meeting on 24 November 1863, the English Football Association settled on the rules '9: No player shall carry the ball. 10: Neither tripping or hacking shall be allowed and no player to use his hand to push adversary' (quoted in Harvey 2005, 143).

At this point in history, it is reasonable to talk, at least, about the dawn of the social historical kind of association football. The rules of not handling the ball, not kicking opponents, not tripping opponents, not holding opponents, not charging opponents, and the like, are woven into the football blueprint and are constitutive rules that are part of the foundation of football (Borge 2019a, 184–185).

Without the rules that prohibit handling the ball and tripping or hacking, it is quite possible that there would be no association football, only rugby football and its various offspring. History disproves the it's-only-regulative-rules move, and that renders baseless the idea that there is no aesthetic credibility to sport moves that are achieved using means not allowed by its governing rules, because there cannot *really* be such sport moves. There is no saving the incompatibility thesis.

2.3. Agon Aesthetics Revisited

Morgan's effort to push my agon aesthetics in an ethical direction presupposes the kind of incompatibility thesis I reject in the book, and because that thesis is untenable, his subsequent critique of my agon aesthetics remains stillborn. Furthermore, Morgan has not properly understood how the dramas created by sports like football are at the centre of my agon aesthetics. Morgan argues that Shakespeare's *King Lear*'s aesthetic value is 'not diminished but buttressed by Shakespeare's depiction of Lear as an unsavoury ethical character (...) because it takes significant literary skill' to pull that off as 'something aesthetically pleasing' (Morgan 2022). There is nothing analogous in football, according to Morgan, since 'the mix of skills it calls for is undermined rather than furthered by players' unethical actions because they do not comport with its lusory goal' (Morgan 2022). Disregarding that this argument appeals to the discredited incompatibility thesis and that its simple-minded *exclusive* focus on skills is foreign to my agon aesthetics, the argument must still be rejected. The disanalogy Morgan finds between play writing and football does not strengthen his position. Shakespeare's literary skill in writing *King Lear* is not in any relevant sense comparable to, say, Cristiano Ronaldo's football skill in feigning an opponent, because whereas by writing Shakespeare creates a drama, by doing step overs Ronaldo is part of one. The literary skill of Shakespeare pertains to the scripting of a drama, but since '[f]ootball is staged, but not scripted' the disanalogy does no harm to my agon aesthetics (Borge 2019a, 205). The correct analogy to investigate is whether there are fictions with unethical characters (part of the fiction) who have aesthetic appeal, i.e. people become engaged in them, and whether there are sports with unethical characters (part of the sport) who have aesthetic appeal, i.e. people become engaged in them. The answer is yes. *King Lear* is one such work of fiction. *Football* is one such sport. That vindicates my agon aesthetics.

In the book, I contrasted this agon aesthetics with what I called *the meritocratic-fairness view of sport* (M-F).

Borge thinks the M-F account is committed to an extraordinary strong reading of the structural goal of football, one that maintains fair outcomes in football are limited only to those cases in which the best, most talented, teams prevail (Morgan 2022).

This is a strawman. I do not saddle the meritocratic-fairness view of sport with being committed to the view that, say, if the current Barcelona team meets Primera División RFEF team Racing Santander at Camp Nou and the latter wins having the match of their life, while the home team has an off-day, then that result is unfair, because the Barcelona team is in general the best, most talented of the two.

What I write is that for ‘the meritocratic-fairness view of sport (...) the nature and aim of a sport is (...) to award the most skilful participant the victory’ (Borge 2019a, 191). This sentence may be ambiguous, in that ‘most skilful’ can be interpreted in relation to previous results, i.e. the best, most talented, or ‘most skilful’ as revealed in the competition on that particular day. The first interpretation is that fair results reflect best or better *overall-skill-ability-potential* (OSAP), while the other interpretation is that fair results reflect best or better *skill-execution-on-the-day-of-competition* (SEDC). That ambiguity is removed when I quote Sigmund Loland as a representative of the meritocratic-fairness view of sport, and Loland writes that ‘[t]he structural goal of sport competitions is to measure, compare and rank two or more participants according to athletic performance’ (Loland 2002, 44; Borge 2019a, 191). When Loland writes about ‘athletic performance’, he has in mind SEDC, and so I portray the meritocratic-fairness view of sport as holding that results must reflect SEDC if they are to be deemed fair. Furthermore, in the book, I described the 2005 Champions League final between the underdogs Liverpool FC and favourites AC Milan, claiming that it had an unfair result. If I understood unfair results along OSAP lines, then such a description would be superfluous, as AC Milan had the best, most talented team of the two. But I did describe the match, trying to convey how much better AC Milan was on that day.

Morgan presents the meritocratic-fairness view of sport as follows.

[T]heir [proponents of the M-F position] central argument is that fair outcomes are not about the *best* team winning but about the *better* team winning on that particular day in that particular game so long as neither team was unfairly disadvantaged by the other during the game (Morgan 2022).

Note that if you compare two things and those two things only, with regard to some quality or another, then if one is the best it is also the better, and vice versa. Why does Morgan suggest that a team can be the best team without being the better team, and the better team without being the best team? It must be that, in the first part of the sentence, Morgan suggests comparing football teams along the best or better OSAP scale, while in the second part of the sentence, he suggests comparing football teams along the best or better SEDC scale. However, if we ignore calling the comparison along the first parameter ‘best’ and along the second ‘better’, as when comparing two and only two things, then they denote the same thing, and if the meaning of ‘best’ or ‘better’ is the same throughout the sentence, then we have a contradiction. Also, Morgan first uses ‘fair’ to talk about the issue of results reflecting skills, while the ‘unfair’ in ‘unfair advantage’ is used to talk about cheating, i.e. breaking the rules of the sport. Be that as it may.

There is no difference in understanding between Morgan and me about the commitments of the meritocratic-fairness view of sport with regard to fair results in sport competitions. To be fair, according to the meritocratic-fairness view of sport, sport results

must reflect SEDC properly and SEDC fairness is the nature and aim of sport. In the book, I claimed that the match in Istanbul in 2005 did not meet that standard, and my discussion of football themes, storylines or narratives shows that I was concerned with SEDC fairness.

The Escape: An escape occurs when a team, though dominated in all aspects of the game by the other team, still manages a draw or a win. The team gets away with a result (so to speak) against the run of play (Borge 2019a, 212).

The escape as a football theme, storyline or narrative is one where the result of the match is *unfair on the day*, i.e. not reflecting SEDC. The formulation 'a team (...) dominated in all aspects of the game by the other team' and the phrase 'run of play' are nonsensical unless we assume that they concern what happened in an actual match, i.e. SEDC. When I then note that '[s]ome comebacks like Liverpool's Champions League victory in 2005 also count as escapes', it is apparent that by using that match as an example of a match with an unfair result, I am talking about SEDC not being properly reflected in the result of that match (Borge 2019a, 212).

That my focus is on SEDC is also shown by my discussion of the football theme, storyline or narrative of the upset.

The Upset: An upset is when an underdog, a team left no chance of winning by experts and others, defies those odds and wins (Borge 2019a, 212).

According to Morgan's interpretation of my reasoning, I should hold that every upset is unfair, because upsets are matches where the best, most talented teams, i.e. teams with most OSAP, do not prevail. This is not my view. Instead, I write that '[u]psets might also be comebacks and quite often are escapes, though they need not be' (Borge 2019a, 212). Upsets need not be unfair, i.e. escapes, and so when I write about the fairness-unfairness of a result, it is SEDC I have in mind, not OSAP.

My agon aesthetics is not solely focused on skills and SEDC, so Morgan concludes that 'Borge argues [that] the drama of football is a beneficiary of "healthy" unethical conduct (unfair outcomes, and the like) but not of ethical conduct per se (fair outcomes, and the like)' (Morgan 2022). This is incorrect. I hold that the possibility of unfair outcomes (the results not reflecting SEDC) enhances the drama of football, or better, 'the game's "chanciness" and low scoring' are part of what 'sets the stage for a dense and sometimes dark drama' (Borge 2019a, 259). I also hold that 'skill is part of the pleasure of both playing and watching football' and that football would not be skill-based if it did not give enough fair results, i.e. results that reflect best or better SEDC (Borge 2019a, 241). I regard sports as skill-based, so there is no sport and, therefore, no sport drama unless the results of sport competitions properly reflect SEDC to a *high enough degree*. Even though football matches quite often give unfair results (the results not reflecting SEDC), I argue that '[w]ith regard to the ratio between skills and chance (...) even in lower leagues, skills play a big enough role for football to meet the requirement unproblematically [i.e., sport being skill-based]' (Borge 2019a, 157). My agon aesthetics is not an either-or view with regard to skills vs. not-skills, i.e. chance or luck, but a both-and view in which being skill-based is a requirement for being a sport. My critique of the meritocratic-fairness view of sport is simply that '[t]he claim about the structural goal of sports made on behalf of the meritocratic-fairness view of sports is too strong' (Borge 2019a, 238). Too strong, not all wrong.

[H]aving rejected the view that the structural goal of football is to deliver fair results, we must also concede to the defenders of the meritocratic-fairness view that part of the structure of football is to deliver fair enough results (Borge 2019a, 238)

My uncontroversial view that sport is skill-based gives my view an immediate overlap with the meritocratic-fairness view of sport, but whereas proponents of the latter see unfair results, i.e. the results not reflecting SEDC, as violations of the structural goal of sport, I do not.

I pursue my challenge of the meritocratic-fairness view of sport along two separate, but interconnected lines. The first argument is *the popularity argument*.

Premise 1: If the structural goal of sport is to give fair results and unfair results violate the structural goal of sport, then the more chancy a sport is, the less popular it is.

Premise 2: It is not the case that the more chancy a sport is, the less popular it is.

Conclusion: It is not the case that the structural goal of sport is to give fair results and unfair results violate the structural goal of sport.

The words 'fair' and 'unfair' in Premise 1 should be read as involving the SEDC scale. When skills are reflected properly in the results of a sport competition, that means that the athletic achievements of participants in the sport contest, i.e. what Loland calls athletic performance, are not influenced by or the result of chance or luck. The greater role chance or luck plays in a particular sport, the more unfair results that sport will have, i.e. results not reflecting SEDC.

If fairness of result, i.e. the results reflect SEDC, was the main or only parameter by which we judge a sport's attractiveness, then if chance or luck played a fairly big role in a sport, that sport should be less popular than other sports in which chance or luck did not influence the results to the same extent. The more chancy sport should not be the most popular, but it is. Among the sports with a fairly large following, football is probably the chanciest, yet also the most popular.

[F]ootball [is] a low-scoring affair, where the margins between scoring and a near miss, between winning and losing are slim, and chance plays a greater role than in similar sports. The mechanics of football, i.e. the way the sport is set up, leaves much to chance, though as already argued, football is a game of physical skill (Borge 2019a, 214).

Empirical research confirms that football is more chancy than other similar sports (Anderson and Sally 2014, 51, 52, 54; Borge 2019a, 251). Football's enormous popularity is at odds with the meritocratic-fairness view of sport, with its sole focus on SEDC and SEDC being reflected properly in the results of sport competitions. This gives us Premise 2, and the conclusion is that the meritocratic-fairness view of sport does not get it right.

The second argument, *the adoration argument*, is centred on the fact that the result of the 2005 AC Milan vs. Liverpool match did not properly reflect SEDC.

If fairness of result with regard to some well-defined definition of the sport-specific skills involved in playing football were at the heart of football as both a phenomenon and a sport, then one would expect matches with unfair results to be frowned upon and not held in high esteem. (Borge 2019a, 191)

The match is by common consensus considered a classic (. . .) If fairness of result were centre stage in football as a sport, and the main parameter by which we should judge the quality of the sport, then football would be a flawed game; games like the 2005 Champion League final would then show how deeply flawed the game is. But, of course, the reactions to the above-mentioned final demonstrate that football is not primarily about fairness (Borge 2019a, 192).

This gives us the following argument.

Premise 1: If the structural goal of sport is to give fair results and unfair results violate the structural goal of sport, then matches with unfair results are frowned upon and not held in high esteem

Premise 2: It is not the case that matches with unfair results are frowned upon and not held in high esteem

Conclusion: It is not the case that the structural goal of sport is to give fair results and unfair results violate the structural goal of sport.

The words 'fair' and 'unfair' in Premise 1 should be read as involving the SEDC scale. Premise 1 should be uncontroversial. We should expect the footballing world to at least have an intuitive grasp on what the structural goal of sport is, such that they would recognize clear violations of it and not hold offending matches in high esteem. I defended Premise 2 using the case of the 2005 match between Liverpool FC and AC Milan (Borge 2019a, 237). The match is not only held in high esteem; it is often thought of as the greatest Champions League final so far. Yet, on the day, that night in Istanbul, according to the standards of SEDC, the winners Liverpool were, for large parts of the game, played off the park and the result was unfair.

Contrary to other commentators, Morgan claims that in the 2005 Liverpool vs. AC Milan match 'the outcome was fair' and that 'Borge offers no empirical evidence that the spectators of this game found the outcome unfair' (Morgan 2022). I enrolled the testimonies of late football great Diego Armando Maradona, English sportswriter Jonathan Wilson, and my own description of it, but let me add some testimonies from the winning team (Borge 2019a, 191-192, 237, 239). Jamie Carragher portrays Liverpool as 'the team with the severest will to win', but admits that 'the quality of Shevchenko and Crespo made us look ridiculous' and 'Milan looked more like grabbing a fourth before we scored our first', while after the comeback in normal time, Carragher's view was that '[w]e were tiring (. . .) the sooner the penalty shoot-out started the better' and in extra time '[w]e were under constant pressure' and '[w]e were hanging on now' (Carragher 2008, 252, 270, 274, 277, 278). 'Gifted a goal, Milan then dominated. We were penned in, terrorized by Kaka's breaks (. . .) This was the half from hell' Steven Gerrard reports, and he refers to the 30 minutes of extra time using the expressions 'Don't let Milan score! (. . .) Backs to the wall. Everybody fought' (Gerrard 2006, 331, 340). His feelings at the final whistle were 'relief and pride that we had fought back to draw, and then *held on*' and that shows us a captain who knew they had got away with one that night (Gerrard 2006, 341, my italics). John Arne Riise does not mince his words: 'AC Milan have humiliated us in the first half (. . .) we've

been completely outplayed' (Riise with Johansson 2018, 2). Then there is the comeback, but also the holding on for a result; '[i]n six magical minutes we've clawed our way back against Milan. And there's still loads of time left. But we're exhausted (. . .). We feel it now. We're at rock-bottom', conceding that 'maybe Milan deserved to win the final in Istanbul' (Riise with Johansson 2018, 98, 142). Didi Hamann assesses Milan's first half 'as near to a perfect performance as you can get and for periods the dominance they showed was almost embarrassing' and for the comeback he tells us that '[t]he emotion of the comeback and the sheer physical effort, I think, had drained us more than Milan (. . .) [e]xtra time for us was really about hanging in there and trying to get to a penalty shoot-out' (Hamann with McClean 2012, 154, 157, 158). Jerzy Dudek describes the first half experience saying, 'Milan played magically (. . .) they were playing fantastic football. We simply couldn't stop them' (Dudek with Kurowski 2016, 178–179). Finally, Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez inadvertently praises AC Milan and their dominance, not so much by what he says, but what he does not say. After the 3 goals in the 6-minute comeback, Benitez writes that '[i]n six minutes, everything had changed (. . .) [w]e might have won it then, with Milan dazed by what had happened, with adrenaline coursing through our veins' (Benitez with Smith 2012, 13). There was a window of opportunity after those 6 minutes and then it closed as '[i]t took Milan some time to regain their composure, but they forced Liverpool to clear a ball off the goal line in the 70th minute. From there on, it was once again, more or less, Milan's match' (Borge 2019a, 192). Giving Liverpool the benefit of the doubt, we might say that there was about 20 minutes when Liverpool was on top and 100 minutes of Milan dominance, including the 30 minutes of extra time. When evaluating the match along the SEDC parameter, AC Milan was the best or better team that night. Premise 2 is sound, and the adoration argument carries the day.

Furthermore, Morgan tells us that a fair result demands that 'neither team was unfairly disadvantaged by the other during the game' and that nothing 'in Borge's retelling of the actions leading up to Liverpool's surprising triumph (. . .) indicates [that] something untoward occurred that defiled the outcome' (Morgan 2022). Footballers play their sport in an uncooperative manner, and in a Champions League final something untoward will take place (Borge 2019a, 154–157).

Here are two examples of Liverpool players defiling the outcome of the match.

The Shirt Tug: Liverpool's equaliser was not scored on a penalty, instead the penalty taker tucked away the rebound. Credit went to Xabi Alonso, but 'the unsung hero during Liverpool's march to parity had arguable been Baroš (. . .) by cynically grappling with Nesta on the edge of the area as Alonso ran up to take his penalty. His final tug on the Italian defender was crucial, giving Alonso extra time to get across to the rebound, a millisecond or two ahead of Nesta's despairing lunge' (Wilson with Murray 2013, 367).

Off His Line: In the penalty shootout AC Milan missed three times, Liverpool once, and of those three AC Milan misses, Liverpool keeper Jerzy Dudek saved two. Contrary to the laws of the game, Dudek was off his line on both occasions. AC Milan's second penalty was saved but '[t]he keeper – having taken three outrageous steps off his line – parried easily. The kick should have been retaken' (Wilson with Murray 2013, 371). Dudek admits that 'I'd taken so many steps by now I was about three metres off the line! (. . .) I knew I was too far off my line (Dudek and Kurowski 2016, 190–191). On the

fourth and decisive AC Milan penalty, Gerrard observed that 'bouncing around on his line and then moving a yard off it (...) Jerzy saved it. Yeeeessss!' (Gerrard 2006, 345).

Evaluated using the SEDC parameter, AC Milan was the best or better team on the day and lost. Then there was the untoward conduct of the Liverpool players that defiled the outcome. On top of that, Liverpool got lucky with the referee. Andriy Shevchenko's goal in the 28th minute should not have been chalked off ('Shevchenko had indeed been half a yard offside past Carragher, but it hadn't been Kaká who poked the ball through to him; it had been Gerrard (...) The goal should have stood') and Sami Hyypiä should have been sent off in the 52nd minute when he brought down Kaká ('This was a red card offence and had the score been 0-0, the referee Manuel Mejuto González would surely have sent Hyypiä off') (Wilson with Murray 2013, 359, 364). Liverpool should have been down 4-0 with only 10 men on the pitch before their comeback started. Yet this match is held in high esteem. In fact, it is revered, but that is cup finals and tournaments for you. They are interesting, unpredictable, unforgiving and wonderful beasts. Contrary to what the meritocratic-fairness view of sport needs to be the case, the footballing world loves them.

2.4. Try a Little Unethical Conduct

In the book, I wrote that 'if drama and emotions are at the centre of the phenomenon of football, then a certain amount of healthy unfairness and, perhaps, a dose of unethical conduct add to the spectacle of football' (Borge 2019a, 192).

While it is *not entirely clear* what sort of conduct Borge has in mind by "healthy unfairness," one explicit example he gives of such untoward conduct are contests whose outcomes your average football spectator perceives to be "unfair" (...) he is *similarly unclear* just what "dose of unethical conduct" he claims is conducive to the drama of football (Morgan 2022).

With regard to the possibility of matches having unfair results because football is chancy, I argued that this gives 'richness in dramatic possibilities (...) adds to the unpredictability of football matches (...) adds to the tension once we are engaged' (Borge 2019a, 7). Of course, too much chance removes the skill component of the sport, thus a healthy dose of unfair results not reflecting SEDC. That sometimes gives 'a dense and sometimes dark drama' (Borge 2019a, 259).

As for unethical conduct, in the book I retold the drama of the end of the quarter final in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa between Uruguay and Ghana, when in the dying seconds of the game, Uruguay's Luis Suárez saved his team from losing by intentionally handballing, then Ghana missed the subsequent penalty with the last kick of the match, while losing the penalty shootout to Uruguay.

PENALTY! RED CARD! HANDBALL! PANIC! DRAMA! Ghana will have a penalty to win it! (...) Gyan missed it! And that's it (...) Amazing scenes: You should have seen Suarez's celebration when that penalty missed. Really, genuinely incredible drama (Simon Burton, The Guardian 2010, quoted in Borge 2019a, 200).

Burton described Suárez's handballing as '[h]orrible cheating', but also as giving us a *really, genuinely incredible drama* (Burton 2010, quoted in Borge 2019a, 200). The peak of the dramatic arc of the match is created and set in motion by Suárez's handball foul. This match was 'a gripping real-time drama of uncertainty of outcome', which we cannot expect from

scripted dramas (Borge 2019a, 247). There is always ‘the possibility for morally inappropriate or unhappy endings’, and in a recent journalistic piece, this feature of the match was praised (Borge 2019a, 247).

Every tournament, though, will throw up at last one segue of incredible drama, of unlikely and since-forgotten heroes, skulduggery and adrenaline-surgingly plot twists. The rest of the quarter-final between Ghana and Uruguay was decent enough. The climax to the 120 minutes made the night unforgettable (Brewin 2020).

That climax is when the last minute goal-bound header from Dominic Adiyiah is saved on the goal line by Suárez’s hand, the latter’s sending off, the wild protests of the Uruguayan players delaying the taking of the penalty kick, Asamoah Gyan’s penalty miss, and finally the subsequent penalty shootout that ‘ended up in a tale of the bad guys running off into the sunset, chortling at their ill-gotten gains’ (Brewin 2020). Here is an example of unethical conduct being conducive to the drama of football, and if you have a heart for African football, you might feel that watching the Uruguayan team unapologetically celebrating their victory is as dark as the drama gets. Yet John Brewin picks it as his highlight of the 2010 tournament, which hardly makes sense if it was actually the case that there was a requirement of neither team being unfairly disadvantaged by the other (unethical or untoward conduct) during the game for the match to give us a drama we can enjoy.

What is more, near the end of his book he provides an example of a 2010 World Cup quarter-final game between Uruguay and Ghana in which Uruguay’s Luis Suarez uses his hand to prevent a potentially game-winning goal by Ghana. This clearly unfair action deprived Ghana of its rightful victory, and as the M-F notion of fair play would lead us to predict, quoting Borge, “Larger parts of the footballing world howled at the injustice and heaped scorn and moral indignation on the cheating Suarez” (Morgan 2022).²

Exactly, and still it was a *really, genuinely incredible drama, which made the night unforgettable*. The end of the 2010 Uruguay vs. Ghana match, with the cheating Suárez and the sequence of events he set in motion, is not aesthetically corrosive to our enjoyment of the match, rather it proved to be its dramatic highlight. My agon aesthetics explains that, whereas the meritocratic-fairness view of sport cannot.

I can also explain how the howls of injustice and scorn heaped on the cheating Suárez sit with us also being gripped by and enjoying the drama of such a match. Righteous anger and indignation can also be part of the agon aesthetics of sport.

Perhaps, the unfair results, the rule breaking, the bad behaviour, etc. and the moral outrage they allow spectators to vent at players and teams – together with the feeling of moral superiority that goes along with such moral outrage – are really part of the charm of watching football matches (Borge 2019a, 248).

Few things make our blood boil as much as feeling we have been done wrong – maybe your team is unlucky and the result is not fair according to SEDC standards, maybe the referee has made mistakes, maybe the other team is engaging in a bit of unethical and untoward conduct, etc. – and this is also a part of the aesthetic appeal of football. This is why I suggested that if we ‘wished to liken the dense drama of the football spectacle to a fictional genre, football looks a lot more like a soap opera than morality plays, Shakespeare plays [etc.]’ (Borge 2019a, 247). Yes, we howled at the injustice that night

in Soccer City, and perhaps later in the bar over drinks lambasted Suárez and lamented the present day crop of players' lack of ethical standards. Perhaps we even lifted our sense of moral superiority by reminiscing over our own golden days of football. But we are not walking away from the game. When the semi-final between Uruguay and the Netherlands arrived, and we were there in eager anticipation of the *garra charrúa* of the Uruguayans and the prospects of another memorable night.

3. Football Matters. Reply to Smith

3.1. Yes, but Is It Naturalism?

Whereas Morgan asked me to put on an ethical straitjacket, Murray Smith requests that I own up to my naturalistic tendencies, pay my dues and become a card-carrying member of *Club Naturalism*, as my approach in *The Philosophy of Football* is 'broadly naturalistic' (Smith 2022). Unfortunately, *Club Naturalism* has various branches whose membership criteria differ to such a degree that one branch's naturalism is another branch's non-naturalism, making it hard to choose.

In the book, my main concern was with Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson's theory of functional beauty and their naturalistic approach, which purged the analysis and understanding of the phenomenon in question of any reference to intentions and intentionality (Parsons and Carlson 2008, 70, 73). I argued that their naturalism is ill suited as a starting point for an aesthetics of a social historical kind like sport, including football. Tucked away in a footnote I lamented that we are stuck with having the labels of 'naturalism' and 'naturalization' attached to this kind of theory (Borge 2019a, 252). I called this our philosophical heritage from the behaviouristic heyday of Willard Van Orman Quine and Wilfrid Sellars. The behaviourist strategy for making psychology a scientifically respectable discipline was to stick to studying publicly observable behaviour and its relationship to its environment. Mental terms or concepts, i.e. intentionality, were deemed unacceptable in a scientific psychology. When the cognitive revolution put the mind back into psychology, the commitment to this kind of view of scientific respectability remained, and out of it grew the project of naturalizing intentionality, which meant either reducing the intentional to the non-intentional or eliminating it. Parsons and Carlson's theory belongs to this tradition. Smith tells us that my 'mention of behaviourism (...) is telling (...) for it is the appropriate target for Borge's concerns about naturalism', but as my rejection of Parsons and Carlson's naturalism shows, that is not correct (Smith 2022). My worry is about intentionality and what membership in *Club Naturalism* will commit me to vis-à-vis intentionality.

Quine once remarked that '[a] curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity', since the answer to the question 'What is there?' is simply "Everything" ~ and everyone will accept this answer as true' (Quine 1948, 21). Of course, this is where it starts. Unless you are going to have a laissez-faire ontology where anything goes, which certainly is not an option for any branch of naturalism, there will be constraints on what you count as belonging to the furniture of the world. Smith's *broad-minded naturalism*, which includes 'actions and intentions, animals and behaviour, gravity and geology, quarks and queerness', is welcoming enough, but merely adopting the moniker of naturalism will not settle any ontological issues with its subsequent debates on

reductionism, eliminativism, unity of science, etc., nor prevent more hard-nosed naturalists from questioning whether I, with my unapologetic intentionalist stance, really belong in the club (Smith 2022).

Instead, we can consider some positions one can take with regard to the natural sciences and the empirical data these provide.

- (1) Be in step with or avoid being in conflict with the teachings of the natural sciences
- (2) Build or draw on the teachings of the natural sciences
- (3) Do not go beyond or be limited to the teachings of the natural sciences

Someone committed to Position 1 need not at all build or draw on resources from the natural sciences in his or her theorizing, while adhering to Position 3 means that one's research is not only restrained by the natural sciences, but also restricted to them. Proponents of Position 3 will often see philosophy as a handmaiden to the natural sciences, where you might be called upon to help clear up some concepts, tighten up the internal coherence of theories, and the like, but there will be no positive contributions from philosophers. My broadly naturalistic approach only commits me to Position 2. This commitment neither restrains nor restricts me in my theorizing, but it does offer me valuable resources. This seems to be Smith's view when he writes that 'philosophical naturalism may be defined as a commitment to the pursuit of philosophical questions *in the light of* the knowledge and method of (...) the natural sciences' (Smith 2017, 22, my italics). Smith calls for 'a third culture' of 'nonreductive, cooperative naturalism' that 'integrates methods and knowledge drawn from across the humanities, the social and the natural sciences' (Smith 2017, 3–4). A third culture could consist of a motley crew of researchers, who draw on the natural sciences when investigating human cultural or social products, while otherwise not following any strict code of naturalistic conduct or adhering to some naturalism orthodoxy. The latter will allow its associates to access resources from history, sociology, anthropology and the like, when the topics under consideration call for it, without having to jump through various naturalism hoops of justification. No doubt you want a certain commitment, dedication and consistency to avoid what Smith calls cherry-picking, where researchers use 'scientific insight in a highly selective and inconsistent manner' (Smith 2017, 3). However, if you want the third culture to be a fertile ground for cross-pollinating research and not a battleground about membership criteria, then sharp boundaries between the right stuff and cherry-picking are not only perhaps not possible, but also unwanted. Differing interests and topics will call for differing interfaces between the various disciplines.³ This I think is the way forward. Never mind *Club Naturalism*, here's the third culture. My book clearly belongs to the latter.

3.2. *Our Engagement in Football*

Consider the following two scenarios. One day Nora decides that she has had enough of her marriage to Torvald. She wants a divorce. She cites irreconcilable differences as the reason. After all, Torvald is Arsenal, she is Tottenham. She can no longer abide with or remain silent in the face of her husband's support of the Gunners. Contrast this with a similar scenario, only this time Torvald is a racist. If your reaction is that leaving your spouse merely because you have different football allegiances is somehow off,

inappropriate or not the right sort of reason, whereas racism is, then you probably hold that these cases are qualitatively different, i.e. different in kind, not merely quantitatively different, i.e. a difference of degree. The way we care about football, i.e. its character, differs from the way we care about racial discrimination. This is the line defended in the book, which Smith challenges by suggesting that '*all of the levels matter*', that all '[m]attering is a relative matter' and that 'mattering is a matter of degree' (Smith 2022). For this to be an alternative to my view, it must be read as suggesting that all mattering is on a continuum. The consequence of the latter is that football allegiances matter in the very same way (though possibly to differing degrees) as racism vs. anti-racism issues do.

Everything matters in the very same manner, only to differing degrees. This *difference of degree only* (DDO) view, in effect, jettisons my distinction between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, as the Maslowian line that everything we care about exists along a continuum leaves no room for it. My notion of the 'extra-ordinary' – understood as that which is 'generally conceived of as something different than everyday life' – helps explain certain patterns of behaviour that would otherwise remain odd or mysterious (Borge 2019a, 17). When it comes to football, we supplement this picture with football also being unnecessary and fictional in character. Equipped with this understanding of the football phenomenon, we can explain the paradox of football: 'how can we come to care so much about something that doesn't really matter?' (Smith 2022).

[W]inning football matches does not matter for most of the people playing or watching the game. Win or lose, life goes on for most in the same way it did before Saturday's match or the end of a league campaign. Still, footballers and their audiences care (Borge 2019a, 4).

We explain this by arguing that football does not exist along the same continuum as ordinary life (it is extra-ordinary) and that it is not a tool for addressing or remedying ordinary world concerns (it is unnecessary) (Borge 2019a, 15–19). We care about football in a different manner or way than we do ordinary, everyday world matters, and I explained how that engagement involves proto-pretence (it is fictional) (Borge 2019a, 4–5, 30–48, 57–58).

Smith's challenge denies that there is anything to explain here. There is not really anything puzzling about grown men and woman investing time, energy and money in the fate of various football teams whose results on the pitch they most certainly know will not help them improve their own life situation. Instead, it all reduces to matters of degree. There are two prongs to the challenge. First, my theory involves more than one mode by which something can matter to us, Smith's only involves one. Theoretical economy favours Smith. Certainly, there are costs. We would have to say that there is nothing off about Nora leaving her husband because of their conflicting football allegiances, only a problematic order of priorities. This is perhaps a small price to pay, especially as one can find examples seemingly in keeping with the DDO view, like Norwegian footballer Kjetil Rekdal admitting that, in light of a personal tragedy, 'football was *no longer everything*' (Rekdal with Østrem 2012, quoted in Borge 2019a, 219, my italics). It mattered less, but it didn't not matter at all. Similarly, Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp reflecting on their last match before the coronavirus lockdown and what followed, said that 'that was the moment when we all realised that obviously football is *not as important* as we thought the night before, when we played against Atlético [Madrid]' (LFCTV, 11 June 2020, my

italics). It was not as important, but it wasn't not important at all. Second, Smith's view also explains cases in which the value of winning football matches is somehow rendered null and void due to, say, health concerns. I argue that '[t]he value of winning football matches is part of football's fictional character', and that, in such cases, it is trumped by ordinary world concerns, while Smith instead appeals to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where basic physiological or safety needs, when under threat, take precedence over other needs further up in the hierarchy (Borge 2019a, 216). Smith places engagement in football at the top-level category of self-actualization, with '[s]porting excellence, of both the amateur and professional varieties' being the thing we care about (Smith 2022). '[F]ootball' Smith tells us, embraces 'a commitment to excellence' and such excellency really matters to us (Smith 2022). The DDO view discards the idea that things might matter to us in different ways and endorses the view that football, at the level of self-actualization, matters just as much as any other thing on that level.

The first strand is troubling. With the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary intact, one can easily explain why most of us would immediately see a difference in kind between movements done in a sacred space during a religious ritual and the same movements done outside such a context, between being witness to a massacre and watching a Hollywood action movie, between taking a leak in a Bedfordshire model porcelain urinal at a local pub and seeing *Fountain* in an art gallery, between the death of a family member and the demise of Romeo and Juliette in a theatre, between a rumble and a sport event like a boxing match, an ice hockey match, a football match, and the like, whereas without this distinction our engagement with regard to these things only varies in degree. That price is too high. Granted, we have the quotes from Rekdal and Klopp, but these are more than offset by the examples to the opposite effect in the book, especially when we consider cases such as the Juventus vs. Liverpool match at Heysel stadium in 1985, when – due to English hooliganism – 39 people were killed and many more injured in the run-up to the match (Borge 2019a, 217–219). Given such cases, it seems clear to me that the DDO view fails to capture the manner in which we care about football. It does not do justice to the incongruence felt by many, both at the time and retrospectively, regarding the fact that the match was played immediately after such violence, whereas my picture does. The view argued for in the book is that when you start killing opposition supporters, for the large majority of the footballing world winning football matches no longer matters, while in the DDO view it does, only to a much lesser degree. That seems plainly wrong to me. *For us*, winning football matches does not exist along the same continuum as life and death matters.

I regard not placing football on the same continuum as life and death matters to be a huge theoretical advantage I hold over Smith's alternative, yet Smith thinks differently. This connects to the second part of his challenge. Smith appeals to an analogy from the world of fiction and fiction appreciation.

[T]he young girl's sadness at the death of Harry Potter's house elf does matter. It matters because it is part of the child's developing understanding of love, friendship, and loss – an understanding channelled through the attachments we form with individuals, actual *and* fictional. Perhaps it even plays a role in her 'self-actualization,' to use Maslow's term – her emerging self-understanding and self-realisation, her growing sense of herself as an agent capable of shaping herself, within limits (...) the experience can be set aside when more pressing and basic needs arise, but for all that the 'merely' pretend, quasi-sadness felt by

the daughter still matters. If we reject this conclusion, we will find ourselves in a race to the bottom of what really matters – the end of which can be nothing other than the conclusion that the only thing that really matters, if anything matters, is mere survival (Smith 2022).

By analogy, we are invited to think that the young girl's own football team and its matches do matter. The suggestion must be that the latter matters because it helps the child develop various motor skills that are important to overall cognitive development and furthers the child's understanding of various things like teamwork, individuality in a teamwork context, coping with losing, and so on and so forth. As with any activity that a child partakes in over a sustained period of time, it will (most likely) play a role in her development as a person and her self-actualization. This all seems reasonable to me, and I did not address this aspect of the football phenomenon, because I made it clear that 'the topic of this book is mainly the game played and watched by grown-ups as adult entertainment (...) [a] full treatment of questions concerning children and sports like football would require a very different book' (Borge 2019a, 4).

If we look at football from the developmental perspective of the youth game, I am prone to think that such considerations would in fact favour my view. If playing football benefits children's cognitive, emotional and social growth, why would one think this is because winning football matches per se really matters? In the book, I argued that play and our ability to play is one of the roots of our engagement in sports like football and that the distinction between the serious and the non-serious is indispensable for understanding the play phenomenon. Play is non-serious. Conduct in play mode does not have the same consequences as the same type of actions done outside the play mode, i.e. in the ordinary world. Take playing dogs. A play bite is non-serious, which means that it does not have the same consequences as a bite has or can have, i.e. it *does not really matter* or it *matters in a different way* than a bite does. I argued that we have evidence showing that nonhuman animals like dogs are aware of play *qua* play, as they have ways of making sure that a play bite is not misunderstood as a bite. The fact that an animal shows awareness that play bites do not count as bites, i.e. do not really matter, while also getting excited, engaged and absorbed by play bites in the play activity, is what I called proto-pretence. Because the current state of research on play holds that play is crucial to development and learning, a reasonable working hypothesis for why play matters in that way is that play carves out a social space that stands apart from ordinary world concerns like getting food, getting shelter, avoiding harm, etc.⁴ If there is some sort of freedom in play and if that freedom is important to development and learning, then what other than the does-not-really-matter aspect of play would account for that? Similarly, if youth football is important in ways comparable to play activity, then my framework suggests a natural way of approaching that topic. Parallel to Smith's girl reading Harry Potter and her sadness at the death of a fictional character, winning football matches matters for the playing or watching children and youth, yet from a developmental perspective it is not the winning of football matches that matters as such, whether as a player or a spectator, but instead the engagement and participation in that sort of activity or practice.⁵ What might matter is that children and youth have arenas at their disposal where they can engage in

something that does not really matter. This is the difference between the internal or intrinsic purpose, aim or goal of football, i.e. winning football matches, and its external or primary purpose, aim or goal from a developmental perspective (Borge 2019a, 28-30).

Self-actualization as envisaged by Maslow's hierarchy of needs matters, but from that it does not follow that the various activities or practices by which an individual can actualize him or herself, all matter in the very same way. Consider my case of the *Cancer Game*, where a 'research group decides to pretend that they are playing a game instead of doing research' and that the game is 'to defeat the cancer cells' (Borge 2019a, 132). The cancer game is revealed not to be an actual game, because the suggestion to 'make the cancer game even more interesting' by doing 'all their experiments with one arm behind their back' would be unacceptable (Borge 2019a, 132). Contrast this with chess or football. The suggestion to make chess or football even more difficult than it already is by introducing some gratuitous limitation or obstacle is fine. Why is there a difference? There is a difference because winning the cancer game matters for the ordinary world concern of curing cancer and, thus, introducing gratuitous limitations or obstacles goes against the rationale of the activity itself, whereas chess or football do not matter in that way and, thus, introducing gratuitous limitations or obstacles is 'a *rational possibility* within the [game and] sport logic of such unnecessary activities' (Borge 2019a, 130). Still, conducting cancer research, playing chess and playing football are activities through which individuals can self-actualize. Smith's alternative would have to treat them on a par with each other. However, one can easily envisage some *trolley-problem*-like scenario, where conducting cancer research takes precedence over the physiological needs or safety needs of individuals, given that curing cancer is regarded as a greater good, whereas winning chess games or football matches does not straightforwardly provide us with a basis for any similar kind of scenario. This in effect meets Smith's second challenge. His alternative Maslow-inspired way of thinking about what matters cannot explain the difference between conducting cancer research, on the one hand, and winning chess games or football matches, on the other, when viewed in light of possible *trolley-problem*-like scenarios, whereas my view can. Maslow's hierarchy of needs does not capture what is at stake here, and so Smith's alternative cannot explain why the value of winning football matches is rendered null and void, due to, say, health concerns.

Furthermore, Smith's sparse theoretical framework will also struggle to make sense of the behaviour of football supporters. In the book, I suggested that the fact that football does not really matter, or 'does not matter in the same way as ordinary concerns do', can heighten supporter engagement, because 'you can lose yourself emotionally in the moment due to the artificiality of a situation (...) that has no ramifications for your own life' (Borge 2019a, 31, 20). If winning football matches matters in the very same way that all other things matter, then we should expect football supporters to be rather tempered in their reaction to events on the pitch, given the relative unimportance of these events for their own life situation. This is not what we find. You need to explain '[t]he discordance between behaviour (wild celebrations on the terraces) and belief (knowledge that their team's win will not improve their life situation)', and my line that football as we enjoy it involves proto-pretence does that (Borge 2019a, 21). To accommodate this observation, Smith would have to introduce some new cog in his theoretical machinery, but then the selling point of theoretical economy no longer holds. Smith's first challenge is met. Also, the Klopp statement I enrolled on behalf of Smith's view, when listened to in full, favours

mine. Klopp went on to say that realizing that football was not as important was ‘a good lesson (. . .) an important lesson’, but then, still addressing Liverpool supporters, he added ‘not for me, not for you especially, because we all knew that’ (LFCTV, 11 June 2020). What did we already know? Klopp elaborated, saying, ‘We have our own problems, we have family, health was always above all the other things, especially health of our loved ones’ (LFCTV, 11 June 2020). How can we make sense of what Klopp said? There was a packed rocking Anfield willing their team to win, only to see it lose in extra-time. The coronavirus crisis, Klopp tells us, taught us the important lesson that football is not as important as the Anfield faithful thought that night, but then Klopp concludes that the very same crowd that wildly celebrated Liverpool’s goals already knew about the match’s relative unimportance. If one, like me, thinks that football is extra-ordinary, unnecessary and fictional in character, then this all makes sense. The lesson learned is of course a reminder of what we already knew; football and our engagement in it is something different than ordinary world concerns.⁶

3.3. *A Race to the Bottom of What Really Matters?*

The fact that the internal or intrinsic purpose, aim or goal of football – winning football matches by outscoring the opponent – does not really matter or does not matter in the same way as, for example, cancer research does, does not mean that football does not fulfil needs that might matter in more substantial ways. Joseph Kupfer argued that an ‘activity exists for the sake of its purpose’, and because scoring and winning are ‘not distinguishable from or “external” to the game itself’, scoring and winning are not the external purpose of sport (Kupfer 1983, 120). The primary or external functions or purposes that football serve are ‘the need for outlets for physical competition and domination’ together with ‘identity-making’, where the latter ‘connects nicely with domination and competition and the raw emotional, us-against-them spectator engagement that the mechanics and execution of the game allow’ (Borge 2019a, 29, 116). It should also be apparent, though it was not made explicit, that ‘creating dramas and dramatic situations to live through or engage in (. . .) is also a reason for why the sport phenomenon of association football thrives in our current cultural and social climate’ (Borge 2021, 313). Having a drama to enjoy is another primary or external function or purpose of football.

These primary or external functions or purposes of football – domination, competition, identity-making and drama-creation – fulfil certain needs, and obviously football matters with regard to those needs. In the book, I suggested that ‘we would do well to employ a pluralistic approach’ when we want ‘to understand these external functions’ and that we should look to ‘various disciplines like biology, history and sociology’ (Borge 2019a, 232). Providing a theory of how these primary or external functions or purposes of football and other sports fit into the mosaic of human interests and concerns is no small feat, especially if one throws into the equation the question of ‘what adaptive advantages are gained, if any, by adult human beings expending large amounts of resources on sports like football’ (Borge 2019a, 256). Suffice it to say here that the argument in the book was the following: ‘[t]he internal aim of sport serves no ordinary or everyday purpose, whereas the external purposes serve other broader needs’ (Borge 2019a, 83). When playing or watching matches, footballers and their spectators are concerned with the sport’s internal or intrinsic purpose, aim or goal, i.e. winning football matches, and it is in relation to this observation much of the debate in the book is set up. Moreover, instead of heeding

Smith's warning that my take on these issues sends us on a race to the bottom of what really matters, we should go there so that we can ask the right questions. Consider a worry raised by Morgan, which I believe at its root addresses the same concern.

Perhaps my line on how winning football matches does not really matter or matters in a different way than ordinary world concerns do is 'too forceful' (Morgan 2022). The world is full of 'injustice and undeserved suffering' and to invest energy, time and money in playing and watching a sport like football 'certainly entails ignoring at least some of our obligations to reduce or eliminate such injustices and undeserved suffering' (Morgan 2022). How 'could we ever really be justified in indulging our love of playing or watching sport?' (Morgan 2022). Indeed! This is a real question, and it follows and is intended to follow from my exposition of football and sport. Few have pressed Morgan's worry harder than Peter Unger, who argued that whenever you indulge in using resources on yourself above some bare minimum needed to live and function, you are in effect letting someone else die (Unger 1996). In his example *Bob's Bugatti*, Unger argues that in a situation where Bob is faced with the option of sacrificing his 'uninsurable Bugatti, wiping out his entire retirement fund' to save the life of a child and chooses not to do so – the consequence being that 'the child is killed' and Bob 'has a comfortable retirement' – then 'everybody responds that Bob's conduct was monstrous' (Unger 1996, 136). Philosophers tend to agree and treat this as an observation of how we react to these sorts of scenarios. This is Step 1. Furthermore, Unger believes that those of us living in affluent parts of the world are related in some way to suffering and dying children in less fortunate parts, just as Bob and his Bugatti are related to the child Bob can save, but chooses to let die. Philosophers tend to disagree about the validity of this step. This is Step 2. The book deals with what happens at the level of Step 1. All my examples are centred on localized cases. When it happens on this pitch, in this stadium, etc., we react in this or that way. Of course, given my view of football and other sports like it, the question of Step 2 follows. I do not give an answer to the question raised by Step 2, and I never intended to. However, if Morgan's worry did not follow from my exposition of how we enjoy football and most other sports, then I would be worried. Sometimes you need to go to the bottom to understand what lies above. This shows us that if you are able to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation and save someone's life, even if it means missing out on a football match you have a ticket for, then we think you should save that life. If you do not stop to help, then everybody responds that your conduct was monstrous. The dialects of these debates in ethics seem to have settled on a consensus: If you can easily save a life here and now, by making no other sacrifice than missing out on a football match, a concert or something similar, then you are obliged to do so. However, there is no consensus in ethics as to whether such an obligation extends beyond that sort of scenario. The book takes on the first uncontroversial part and allows the controversial second issue to be raised within its theoretical framework, so it seems to me that my argument about how football matters for us is not too forceful, but just about right. It would also seem fitting that Smith brings in Susan Wolf's view on moral saints as characters who miss out on a variety of exciting and pleasurable experiences like watching football, taking leisurely strolls, playing the piano, baking cakes, bird watching, gardening, etc., and who, thus, lead strangely barren lives (Wolf 1982). After all, one take on Wolf's observation is that, in a deeply unjust world, this is the predicament all of us in richer parts of the world find ourselves in, where most of us end up staying in our downgraded version of *Omelas*, while the rest of the world suffers.

3.4. *Sporting Excellences and Their Place*

Setting aside the issue of the dilemma of spending resources on something like sport in a world filled with injustice and suffering, Wolf admits that reading fiction, playing music or playing sport are not ‘necessary element[s] in a life well lived’ and yet a life with none of these ‘seem to be a life strangely barren’ (Wolf 1982, 421). Admittedly, regarding sport, I do know people with no interest in sport, and their lives never seem strangely barren to me. However, Wolf’s point is not that there is necessarily a particular activity you should attend to, but that moral sainthood, where all non-moral activities and interests are given up until we have a just world, ‘does not constitute a model of personal well-being’ we should strive for (Wolf 1982, 419). Sport is not necessary, and yet the coronavirus crisis, with its absence of sport, showed just how much many of us missed our sporting action fix. This does not mean that sport, after all, belongs on the same continuum as life and death matters. Rather, we should entertain the idea that it is perhaps important for our well-being to have something unimportant to care about, i.e. something that does not really matter or matters in a different way than ordinary world concerns do. Something we enjoy using our capabilities on or watching others use theirs without worrying about ordinary world ramifications. Football gives us that, and without it life suddenly seemed strangely barren for some of us, not because football is necessary or matters in the same way as ordinary concerns do, but precisely because it does not. Football and other similar sports give us something different than the ordinary everyday world does and that is why when the sport is gone; its absence is felt.⁷ As I made clear in the book, there is more work to be done in this area. We need to pursue a deeper understanding of the primary or external functions or purposes of various sports and how they operate – in concert with various mental mechanisms and ordinary world concerns – on the backdrop of evolutionary considerations. In this regard, Smith’s sporting excellence, as something through which we self-actualize, can be considered a candidate for a primary or external function or purpose of football and other similar sports. However, I think it should be regarded as derivative from the fact that sports are competitions. When considering competition as a primary or external function or purpose of a sport like football, one does well to add that the activity or practice also provides a venue for development, which can reach all the way to sporting excellence, and that this is the sort of thing we typically find satisfying as a way of self-actualizing within the context of the sport contest.

Our notion of ‘excellence in sport’ is ‘a relative notion or term’ (Borge 2019b, 439).

[E]xcellence in sport or a sport seems intrinsically linked to the ontology of sport, in general, and the mechanics of individual sports, in particular, i.e. being a competition with certain standards for quality performance, which enables a participant or practitioner to win or do well (Borge 2019a, 249).

The internal or intrinsic purpose, aim or goal of sport is to win, so sporting excellence finds its place within the primary or external function or purpose of having a competition or fulfilling the need to compete. Sporting excellence for us is relative to sport being ‘competitions that yield enough losers’ (Borge 2019b, 440). In human sports, sporting excellence demands that not everyone is excellent at the sport in question (Borge 2019b,

443–444). The latter connects with the primary or external function or purpose of domination or fulfilling the need to dominate. We find that when we think about sporting excellence, *agon* (competition) frames *areté* (striving for excellence), so that the latter only emerges in the context of the former.

In the book, I dealt with and rejected Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and his theory of sporting excellence by showing how Gumbrecht cannot explain how he himself prefers college versions of American football and basketball instead their professional and more excellent counterparts, while I can (Borge 2019a, 243–244). Gumbrecht's attempt to place *areté* over *agon* was found wanting. To avoid this objection, Smith argues that in football we embrace 'a commitment to excellence – footballing nous – where the standard of excellence is relative to the level of the game being played' (Smith 2022). There is something to this. Sometimes we 'adjust our standards of excellence' and allow ourselves to talk about, for example, an excellent Championship player (English second level football), whom we acknowledge would not cut it at the top level (Smith 2022). However, there is a problem with Smith's relative sporting excellence line. How can we stop the slide of relative standards towards deeming mediocrity or even shoddiness also as displays of excellence? If your team is hopelessly adrift at the bottom of the table in your division having already been relegated, then your team is not actually excellent relative to the standard of already relegated teams hopelessly adrift at the bottom of the table in that division. Why does that level not give us a standard by we can use to accredit excellence? An obvious answer suggests itself. Talk of excellence when the comparison class is not all football teams is relative to the way football is organized into men's football, woman's football, world cups, continental championships, national leagues with their football pyramids, age groups, and so on and so forth. A team, player, etc., is excellent qua Premier League level, qua Championship level, and so on and so forth. How then to decide excellence at those varying levels? Easy. You look at sporting success, i.e. how many matches won, how many drawn, etc., which is why our already-relegated-hopelessly-adrift-at-the-bottom-of-the-table team does not count as excellent. *Agon* dictates *areté* even when the latter is relativized in the manner envisaged by Smith. That, however, invalidates Smith's line as an alternative to the picture presented in the book. When Smith tells us that 'it is this excellence that inhabitants of the footballing world care about', i.e. relative sporting excellence, we now know that relative sporting excellence is relative to footballing success, i.e. winning football matches, the latter having been established in the book as something that does not really matter or matters in a different way than ordinary world concerns do (Smith 2022).

Furthermore, consider the case when, at the beginning of the 2021-22 season, a German football fan decides to stop watching Bundesliga football in favour of lower-level league football, because the latter provides more drama and unpredictability in the fight for the top spot than the former does, where Bayern München has nine consecutive wins. Adjustment of standards of excellence cannot explain why someone would do that, because in this case the comparison class includes the top-level league with its top team, and so it is Bayern München that sets the standard of excellence. In this case it should follow, according to Smith's view, that one prefers watching Bundesliga football because it is at the top level of the comparison class. That, however, is not necessarily the case, as there is more to the *agon* aesthetics of sport than (relativized) sporting excellence alone. Notwithstanding that sporting

excellence is part of the equation of how and why we enjoy sports both as sportspeople and spectators, it cannot do the theoretical work Smith wants it to do. Like Gumbrecht, Smith's view fails to deliver, whereas my agon aesthetics, with its emphasis on drama, easily accommodates and explains these cases.

4. Sport ... but How to Live It? Reply to Weatherson

4.1. The Sporting Attitude and Levels of Analysis

After a wholesale rejection of my agon aesthetics and a clear-cut alternative to my line on how we care about the game, Brian Weatherson merely argues that my understanding of the lusory or sporting attitude required for football and sport is too weak. Nonetheless, it is no less of a challenge. Drawing on several counterexamples or problem cases, Weatherson suggests replacing my minimal requirement for being part of a sport event, 'where mere sport participants endure or tolerate the implementation of a sport's constitutive rules, whereas sport practitioners also aim at fulfilling sport's lusory goal of winning, minimally not losing', with a default or quasi-incompatibility thesis telling us that '[b]eing a football player involves taking a certain attitude towards actions' (Borge 2021, 309, see Borge 2019a, 138–157, Weatherson 2022).⁸ In this connection, failing to have that attitude is 'really not compatible with playing' and when it happens that footballer has 'to some extent ceased to be a player' (Weatherson 2022). Fortunately, this unstable position of portraying some footballers as sort of not playing the sport – thus to some extent having ceased to be a footballer – but also as sort of playing the sport – thus to some extent not having ceased to be a footballer – is not needed in order to make sense of sport and football.

The view argued for in *The Philosophy of Football* can account for what goes on in the Weatherson cases, when employing some of its key distinctions, like those between the content or nature of sport and the character of sport, between lusory and prelusory goals, and, as already mentioned, between mere sport participants and sport practitioners. When we are clear about the level of analysis at which a Weatherson case is to be addressed – (i) Is it about what football qua sport is (content) or how it is played or should be played (character), (ii) about the will to win particular sport competitions (lusory goal) or wanting to have a sport or particular sport competition to partake in (prelusory goal), (iii) about what it takes to be part of a particular sport event (sport participants) or what is needed for there to be sports (sport practitioners), or, finally, (iv) a mixture of all or some of these? – then an empirically accurate and ontologically sane picture emerges, where anyone who is clearly part of a football match is accounted for within the book's theoretical framework as part of that football match and not left hanging in a halfway in, halfway out ontological limbo. With regard to a sporting or lusory attitude, there is more than one way to partake in sport.

4.2. The Varieties of Partaking in Sport

The basic tenet of my *foundational formalism* is that '[s]ports are founded on their constitutive rules', such that if you take away the constitutive rules of a particular sport, 'you no longer have (...) that particular sport' (Borge 2019a, 70). For there to be goals in football, there must be some sort of *constitutive rule formula* stating when something counts as a goal and that must in turn be implemented in actual football matches. With

regard to *what sport is* and it being rule based, if we ‘distinguish between the formal aspect of a sport and the functional aspect of a sport [internal or intrinsic purpose, aim or goal of the sport]’ and consider ‘a sport’s form [the rulebook or the blueprint of the sport] in isolation from its function’, we find that ‘the form can partake in various functions’ (Borge 2019a, 101, 102). The sport form is the bare bones of a sport, and ‘[w]e can evaluate the football form and other sport forms with regard to bare-bones formalism using the following five parameters: use, abuse, application, appropriation [and] parroting’ (Borge 2019a, 103). It is only when there are sport practitioners aiming to achieve sport’s lusory goal of winning, minimally not losing, i.e. sport’s internal or intrinsic purpose, aim or goal, that the sport form in question is used and that we have sport and a sport event. Consider the following case.

Football and the Natives: A tribe of native Norwegians coming to the British Isles oversees a football match. Not having any conception of sport, the natives quickly conclude that this is some form of elaborated ritual. Imagine the natives’ amazement when, courtesy of the British weather, it starts pouring down just before the end of the match. Highly impressed, the natives acquire a rule book and bring home what they take to be an elaborated rainmaking ritual; they then start acting in accordance with their understanding of the rule book of football (Borge 2019a, 79–80).

There are no practitioners of football *qua* sport in this case and without that, no sport. The natives are not aiming at winning a football match, because they are doing something else, i.e. performing a ritual. The natives have appropriated the football form.

This does not mean that if not everyone in a football match fulfils the requirement of using the football form, then the match *qua* sport is invalidated. Regarding individual footballers in a football match, being a practitioner, i.e. fulfilling sport’s lusory goal of winning, is best viewed as a sincerity condition (Borge 2019a, 151–152). In the same way as liars are also asserters when they tell their lies, footballers who violate the sincerity condition of sport are still footballers and count as sport participants, if the football form is in use in the event they are part of. *Ipsa facto*, if the football form is used, then *prima facie* all involved count as playing football and being footballers. Avoiding baroque explanations dictates that one endorse this conclusion. Consider the following case.

The Clueless Matchwinner: Ringo has been drafted into John’s football team to make up the numbers. Ringo is totally confused about what is happening around him, yet at one point he wanders into the ball’s trajectory, gets hit and becomes the matchwinner.

How absurd it would be if the matchwinner was deemed at the same time to not be playing football. Any such conclusion should be avoided, because the matchwinner is clearly part of the football match. The inclination to treat someone like Ringo as not really playing football or to some extent not being a player is the result of not distinguishing between mere sport participants and sport practitioners.

In a stepwise fashion, we confront the various *but-that’s-not-really-football* counter-examples or problem cases by posing the following questions.

Question 1. With regard to a player/players/team/teams/etc. in certain types of episodes/incidents/matches/etc. we ask: Are they meant to raise the issue of what it takes to play a specific sport like football and its relation to the sport form or what it takes for a sport form like the football form to be used and thus, in the latter case, what it takes for the sport of football to exist?

Regarding the former, there is an assumption that we have the sport in question in place, i.e. the social historical kind of football exists, and thus we are not addressing *the foundational issue* of what it takes to be a sport like football, but instead *the partaking issue*, what it takes to play football. In this case we move on to Question 2 and Question 3. Regarding the foundational issue, we jump to Question 4.

Question 2: With regard to a player/players/team/teams/etc. in certain types of episodes/incidents/matches/etc. we ask: Is the sport form, i.e., the football form, used or not?

If it is not, then we can inquire whether the sport form, i.e. the football form, is abused, applied, appropriated or parroted. Furthermore, in such cases no one is playing football. Take our *Football and the Natives* case and add that a Brit joins the native football rainmaking ritual, where the Brit aims at winning what he or she takes to be a football match. In the *Native Football Rainmaking Ritual and the Brit* case, our Brit will not succeed, simply because no football match is actually being played.

Our default position is that if the football form is used, then everyone on the pitch on either team counts as being footballers and playing football. However, for a rule-based activity like sport and football, this needs to be supplemented with the requirement of the rules being allowed, permitted or tolerated to apply or take effect.

Question 3: When the sport form, i.e. the football form, is used and with regard to a player/players/team/teams/etc. in certain types of episodes/incidents/matches/etc. we ask: Does the player/players/team/teams/etc. in question endure or tolerate the implementation of the sport's constitutive rules?

If the answer is yes, then one is part of a football match, as 'being subjected to arbitration of the rules of football' is part of our 'minimal requirement' for counting as being a footballer and playing football (Borge 2019a, 150). If it is no, then one is not part of a football match.

To make this minimal requirement vivid consider the case of England's World Cup winner Jack Charlton, who 'on the goal line, intentionally pushed the ball out with his hand keeper-style in the semi-final of the 1966 World Cup against Portugal' (Borge 2019a, 185). Charlton broke a constitutive rule of the sport, yet he was playing football. Had handballing at that point been seen as unacceptable rule-violation behaviour, i.e. at odds with the sport's ethos, then Charlton would still be playing football, because having a shared ethos is not a requirement for having a football match (Borge 2019a, 146-149). However, 'if Charlton, after his blatant handball, had picked up the ball and run towards the Portuguese half of the pitch, he would no longer have been playing football (...) because by doing so he would have been ignoring the referee's call to award a penalty (...) he would no longer have been accepting, enduring or obeying the arbitration of the rules of football' (Borge 2019a, 186). What excludes Charlton in this imaginary scenario is

not his attitude, but what he does. Charlton brings the game to a standstill. Enduring or tolerating the implementation of a sport's constitutive rules should be read as a factual requirement, not one about attitude. In the book, I dubbed it '*the lusory state*' (Borge 2019a, 150). Imagine another scenario where Charlton wants to pick up the ball and run with it, but cannot get hold of it, resulting in the inept Charlton on the pitch scoring a goal by happenstance. Like Ringo in the *Clueless Matchwinner* case, a goal scorer is clearly part of the football match, so despite his attitude and efforts to the opposite, Charlton remains a player in this scenario. These conclusions confirm the rule endurance-tolerance requirement for being a footballer and playing football and follows from the book's general line of endorsing foundational formalism in relation to sports.⁹

Affirming Q2 and Q3 gives you *sport participants*. This minimal requirement allows us to count among those doing sport 'young children being habituated into a sport with little or no grasp of the fact that they are doing a sport', while also admitting certain animal sports into the sport pantheon (Borge 2021, 310, 2019a, 136-137, 149-150). It handles any counterexample or problem case where someone is ignorant about the social kind that is being enacted, while nonetheless also clearly being part of those sport proceedings because he or she can be causally efficacious within the sport event. The same goes for counterexamples or problem cases where a player forfeits the lusory attitude of sport in favour of some other motivation. Overall, we avoid ending up with baroque explanations of how, say, non-footballers can decide actual football matches, because mere sport participants count as doing sport, while at the same time making theoretical space for saying that something is off in such cases, as aiming to win is a sincerity condition of playing a sport like football. Finally, we quell standard Kant-inspired qualms of the but-what-if-everyone-acted-that-way variety by pointing out that, while mere sport participants can play football, tennis, rugby, etc., it takes more than these to have sport. The latter points to the necessity of sport practitioners for sport to exist.

Usage of a sport form demands more than merely going through its formal motions; it demands that players or, in specific cases organizers of the sport and others, aim at achieving the lusory goal of sport.

Question 4. With regard to a player/players/team/teams/etc. in certain types of episodes/incidents/matches/etc. we ask: Does the player/players/team/teams/etc. aim at achieving sport's lusory goal of winning, minimally not losing, whichever sport competition they partake in?

If the answer is no, we go to Q2 and possibly Q3, to see whether they count as sport participants. If it is yes, we have *sport practitioners* with the sort of sporting attitude, aka lusory attitude, that together with constitutive rules of a sport, when the latter are implemented, form the foundation of a sport like football. For a sport form to be used and thus for us to have a specific sport like football, we must have practitioners of that sport. At the same time, as the *Native Football Rainmaking Ritual and the Brit* case shows, aiming at winning, minimally not losing, does not in itself make one a practitioner of the sport one believes one is playing, if, as it happens, the sport form in question is not used. This type of interdependence when considering the established or mature version of a social historical kind like football should come as no surprise.

Finally, we decide to play and watch sport, and if we disagree, dislike, object, take exception to, etc., the way a particular sport is, i.e. its nature, the way it is ordinarily played, i.e. its character including sport ethos, or actions or events that occur in a sport event, then we can either individually or collectively bring the sport event in question to a halt. The latter scenario leads to the issue of our willingness to be or continue to be part of a particular sport event in light of that sport's or sport event's character including its ethos, or particular actions or events that take place when playing. In the case of some or all walking away from the sport event, then something in the game is *sport-destroying* for that individual or collective, i.e. destroying the willingness to partake in the sport event (Borge 2019a, 167, 217-223, Borge 2010-2018, 171-172). There is no principled limit to what can be sport-destroying, but from the viewpoint of human sports, i.e. the way we actually have and do play sports like football, there are in practice things like disagreement about rule implementation, level of physicality, racism, serious injuries, etc., that lead to either individual or collective abandonment of football matches.

Consider the Dutch football team Ajax's experience in the Intercontinental Cup in the 1970s.

In 1971, Ajax refused to face Uruguayan club Nacional (...) due to fears over their violent style of play (...) Ajax did agree to play in the 1972 edition (...) At half-time the Dutch team wanted to abandon the game due to the abuse they had received during the first-half but were persuaded to continue (...) After winning their third consecutive European Cup, Ajax again refused to take part in 1973 (Lawrence 2015).

These incidences help us home in on questions about the sport's character, ethos, etc., and our willingness to play, but not directly on what it takes to be a footballer or to have the sport of football. After all, '[t]he South America-Europe rivalry is ripe with fraught but *completed matches*, such as those early clashes (...) in the Intercontinental Cup', and all the above-mentioned Intercontinental Cup finals took place (Borge 2019a, 148-149, my italics).

Question 5. With regard to a player/players/team/teams/etc. in certain types of episodes/incidents/matches/etc. we ask: Is the episodes/incidents/matches/etc. actually or potentially sport-destroying for the player/players/team/teams/etc. in question?

The question of actual or potential sport-destroying episodes/incidents/matches/etc. assumes that there is a sport being played by a certain number of sport practitioners and *as such* it addresses neither the partaking nor the foundational issue. However, it tells us something about human sports, which relates to those issues, because it concerns what we are willing to endure or tolerate in order to have a specific sport or sport event.

In the book, I addressed this with regard to both the character of the game and ethos. The Iranian national football team's experience in the 1978 World Cup in Argentina served as a case of differing ethos, where they 'suffered from not being in line with how the referees (...) interpreted the rules' (Borge 2019a, 148). Given that '[t]his was Iran's first appearance in a World Cup (...) they were not going to walk out of such a prestigious tournament', i.e. it was not sport-destroying for them, however, it is not a given that they would not have, had 'the clash between football cultures (...) taken place in a park game' (Borge 2019a, 153). A difference in prestige can influence one's willingness to play the

sport, when one's own understanding of rule implementation is at odds with what is actually employed. What is not sport-destroying in one context might be in another. The same applies to the level of physicality, tactics, rule breaking, audience atmosphere, etc., one is willing to accept.

I suspect that many games among amateurs (...) are played in a more cooperative manner than at the sport's upper levels (...) players at such levels are not willing to suffer the game behaviour that one finds at the upper levels. If enough prestige, identity, money, etc. are invested in particular matches, then one's level of tolerance for rule and ethos violations might be higher than if a game is played out more or less only for the entertainment of having a football match to play. Players tend to find a sense of proposition between their desire to win a match and the level at which a match is being played (Borge 2019a, 188).

The manner in which a match is played, i.e. that game's particular character, can put an end to players' willingness to be part of that match, but that depends on the circumstances of each match, such as the level at which the match takes place. Moreover, there is nothing about sport and football that conceptually prevents a park game from being as hard fought as a World Cup final, a Champions League final, etc. Furthermore, as shown in the book with regard to racism, audiences can be a disruptive force in a match, causing players and spectators alike to lose interest in playing and watching football – thus, audiences can be sport-destroying (Borge 2019a, 218).

4.3. Addressing the Weatherson Cases

Weatherson's inquiry of '[w]hat attitude towards a game should players take' and his accompanying three questions, which lead to the challenge of his counterexamples or problem cases, can be met (Weatherson 2022). However, before we get there, two verbal disagreements need to be sorted out. My minimal requirement for partaking in a sport like football was to 'endure, obey or accept the arbitration of the rules of football'; earlier I wrote it was to 'defer to the referee and to respect his decisions' and recently to 'endure or tolerate the rule arbitration of the sport event you are part of' (Borge 2019a, 150; 2010, 168; 2021, 318). Weatherson takes me to task with his *Irish Free Kick* case, where the Germans move after having lined up the wall.

[T]he referee clearly said where they were supposed to stand (...) as soon as his back was turned, four pairs of feet started shuffling forward in unison (...) The lesson for us is that the players don't have to respect the referee in the sense of doing what he says, or even endure his decisions; if they can get away with it they will just do something else (Weatherson 2022).

This is an excellent example of how footballers at the upper levels of the game play in an uncooperative manner.

[T]he uncooperative character of football finds its way into the game through the various efforts made by players, at least at the upper levels of the game, to seek game advantages by bending, breaking or violating the game's various rules and ethos requirement, when trying to win the match (...) At its upper levels, football is a niggling game in which players seek to understand the ethos of the game only to try to stay on its edges and go slightly beyond them, the aim being to gain game advantages over the opposition (...) Footballers at this level have a tendency to manoeuvre on and over the edges of the sport ethos, i.e. rule interpretation (Borge 2019a, 154, 155).

There is no substantial disagreement here. Factually, the Germans allowed the rules to be implemented, i.e. the referee awarded the free kick and Irish took it, and that meets my minimal requirement for the lusory state of sport and football. The other terminological issue is how to understand the notion of ethos in relation to sports. Weatherson complains that I am ‘reading too much into the notion of an ethos’, when I argue that ‘[a] shared ethos is not necessary for playing the same sport’, but our understandings of ethos differ (Weatherson 2022, Borge 2019a, 147). Orthodoxy in philosophy of sport is to follow Fred D’Agostino in thinking that ‘[t]he ethos of a game *G* is that set of conventions which determines how the rules of *G* are to be applied’, and I have followed that understanding (D’Agostino 1981, 15). I refer to other surrounding features of the manner in which we do a sport as a sport’s character. Weatherson lumps these two together, and readers should be aware of the difference. We are now in a position to consider the other Weatherson cases.

The Attitude and Game Conduct of George and Webb: In a football match, George carries the ball Rugby style, while Webb aims at acting like George, but cannot get his hands on the ball. Neither is playing football, according to Weatherson (Weatherson 2022).

This is a partaking issue. George, like our imagined ball-carrying Charlton, is not playing football because he is not enduring or tolerating the implementation of the sport’s constitutive rules, whereas Webb is playing football because his ineptness in fact puts him in the lusory state. Certainly, you might say, ‘there is an important sense in which he is not [playing football]’ and there is (Weatherson 2022). Webb is not a football practitioner, yet he is also clearly part of the football match, as he too can end up a goal scorer, even the matchwinner.

The Defending of Ellie and Sam: In a football match, Ellie blocks a cross, cleanly tackling the ball over the goal line, while Sam “prevents the cross by sliding in and bundling the ball, the attacker, the corner flag and the watching sideline official over the goal line” (Weatherson 2022). In both cases, “the officials should (. . .) award an unobstructed kick to the attacking team by the corner flag”, but there is “a key difference between the cases” that needs explaining (Weatherson 2022).

In fact, these two actions yield two different reactions, namely a corner kick and a free kick. With Ellie it matters who touched the ball last – the defender and we have a corner kick, the attacker and we have a goal kick – while Sam’s foul results in a free kick independent of this question. This is a key difference. Be that as it may. Weatherson argues that ‘[i]n a normal football game (. . .) Ellie would be getting fist bumps (. . .) [b]ut it would be *very poor form* for Sam’s teammates to react in the same way’ (Weatherson 2022).¹⁰ Weatherson concludes that this shows that ‘[b]eing a football player involves taking a certain attitude towards actions, and that attitude requires distinguishing Sam and Ellie’s attitude’ (Weatherson 2022). Similarly, Weatherson thinks Luis Suárez’s handball in the 2010 World Cup is an action type one should not applaud. This is because the rules of football are ‘categorical imperatives’ and ‘the players’ attitudes towards them [are] as providing reasons’ (Weatherson 2022). That is ‘why we don’t celebrate tackles like Sam’s, or saves like Suárez’s’, because ‘they had reason not to do [the tackle or save]’ and to celebrate them ‘is a kind of complicity in wrongdoing’ (Weatherson 2022). Unfortunately, empirically this

does not hold up. In an interview in 1966 after the Portugal match, Charlton described the handball situation as ‘you got to give a penalty away, which I consider I had to do’.¹¹ You would not expect such an unapologetic embrace of his handballing, if being a footballer means having reasons not to do what Charlton did. To echo Weatherson, not to show regret in such a case seems like persistent complicity in wrongdoing. Similarly, Suárez was equally unapologetic for his handball in 2010. Neither Charlton in 1966 nor Suárez in 2010 meets Weatherson’s requirement that players ‘do have to respect the rules of the game’, when the latter is read as not being fine with their own fouls (Weatherson 2022). In fact, one generally finds that footballers at the upper levels of the game remain fairly unapologetic about their fouling, showing little or no signs of regretting their own intentional rule trespassing.¹² Finally, very poor form and the like aside, Charlton and Suárez were clearly part of a football match when they performed their goal line handball trick, so as an answer to the parking issue, this view must be rejected.

Weatherson is mistaken when he claims that we at football matches do not applaud or celebrate players who commit fouls.

The football world does not ridicule good old-fashioned professional fouls, like an Ole Gunnar Solskjær hunting down Newcastle United’s Rob Lee (. . .) only to viciously hack him down from behind *to the applause of the Old Trafford faithful* (. . .) Solskjær took one for the team, got sent off and *the home crowd recognized that* (Borge 2019a: 168, my italics).

Not only does the football world not ridicule them, but sometimes parts of it celebrate a ‘Solskjær running the lion’s share of the pitch cutting down his opponent before he can score’ (Borge 2019a, 168). Moreover, your so-called hard men of the game – Roy Keane, Hristo Stoichkov, Duncan Ferguson, etc. – tended to be revered by their own and the question of the complicity in these hard men’s wrongdoings did not seem to arise very often among management, teammates and supporters alike.¹³

Lisa’s Wall Bounce and Arm Control Routines. In a park game, Lisa escapes a tricky situation by bouncing the ball off a wall that is right next to the pitch. According to Weatherson, this is “really not compatible with playing” (Weatherson 2022). Then imagine another park game, where Lisa discovers that an incompetent referee is failing to notice or penalise players “using their arms to control passes that come in at chest height” and so she starts doing that every time she can. Weatherson stops short of writing that Lisa, in the latter case, is not really playing football, but it seems like that is the view he wants to hold (Weatherson 2022).

I have already addressed this kind of issue arguing that ‘[w]hen the shirt tugging avant-garde gained a game advantage, the rest of the players followed suit’ (Borge 2019a, 155). No doubt, if players at the upper levels of the game could get away with such wall bounces or arm controls, they would do it. The fact that Weatherson lets his case play out at the park game level is irrelevant to the partaking issue and the foundational issue as formulated in the book. The case is unrealistic, but experience teaches us that footballers at upper levels would, if they could, because ‘[f]ootball is *that kind of sport*’ (Borge 2019a, 140).

The *Lisa’s Wall Bounce and Arm Control Routines* case should be framed as being about the character of a sport, i.e. how we play it and our willingness to play it, i.e. what, if anything, would be sport-destroying for those participating in a match. The deepest

cut I make in this conceptual space in the book is between sports that are fictional in character and those that are not. The fictional sport of *Roller Ball Murder* is not fictional in character, while our football is (Harrison 1975). Furthermore, one and the same sport might differ with respect to character both diachronically and synchronically. My line is that players tend to find a sense of proportion between their desire to win a match and the level at which a match is being played. Lisa's wall bounce and arm control routines might be sport-destroying in a park game among friends, while not in a top-level match. Weatherson's request for us to think 'about games that are low stakes' in order to 'get a better sense of what's permissible', on the other hand, goes against that (Weatherson 2022). It would seem that we find real football at low-stakes matches, whereas high-stakes top-level matches are somehow not quite real. Weatherson needs to endorse such an error view of football, where we all mistakenly believe that the World Cup final is fully football, because he wants to defend the intuition that when Lisa bounces the ball off that wall 'she has to some extent ceased to be a football player' (Weatherson 2022). Weatherson correctly observes that '[i]t's part of football that walls are not in play', but mistakenly concludes from this that 'being a player requires acting as if that's true' (Weatherson 2022). As rare and highly unlikely as Lisa's wall bounce routine is, it is just another football rule-breaking act or rule-ignoring act, which happens all the time in football. The reasons for rejecting the Suitsian incompatibility thesis apply likewise to Weatherson's default or quasi-incompatibility thesis. In the case where Lisa knows that she 'won't get any advantage from this, because the referee will simply award a throw in to the opposition' and she 'become[s] someone who likes to show off football skills', my diagnosis is that Lisa is violating football's sincerity condition of aiming at winning, minimally not losing, and this explains any intuition that she's not really playing football any more or to some extent has ceased to be a player (Weatherson 2022). Given that the football form is used in this case, we ask Q3. Lisa, as presented in the wall bounce incidence, endures or tolerates the implementation of the sport's constitutive rules, thus Lisa counts as being a footballer.

Playing for Oneself: Consider "an East German player playing in France (...) spending the whole game looking for the safest moment to deflect" and "a girl (...) finally getting a chance to play in front of a scout, and for this game only caring about how impressive her play is" (Weatherson 2022). According to Weatherson, these kind of incidences are "[e]xceptions [that] can be tolerated, as long as they are exceptions" (Weatherson 2022).

My line in the book is that, as long as the football form is used, i.e. there are sport practitioners, a football match can allow or involve one or more mere sport participants, while still remaining a sport and football event.

While the deflection case is fairly unrealistic, the case of the girl is all too familiar for many clubs, where some local star – knowing he or she is being scouted – becomes something of a solo player. In any event, if we read the *Playing for Oneself* case as being about both players violating the sincerity condition of the sport by not caring about how the match ends, then both are still playing football and are footballers, given that we confirm Q2 and Q3. When Weatherson considers versions of the *Playing for Oneself* case, where everyone on the pitch acts like the East German and the girl, he replicates my *Fully*

Fixed Match and *Football and the Bust* cases, where we would deny Q2 and instead inquire as to whether the football form is being abused, applied, appropriated, or parroted (Borge 2019a, 103-107). These are cases of abuse of the football form, where there is '[c]overt or deceptive usage of the football form (the formula for the sport) for some other purpose than the sport's internal aim' (Borge 2019a, 103). Like the other counterexamples or problem cases presented by Weatherson, I can deal with the *Playing for Oneself* case in its various versions within the theoretical framework presented in the book.

4.4. *Lusory and Prelusory Goals: Balance and Interplay*

Weatherson thinks that there is something about the rules of a sport as providing reasons that is missing from my account of football and sport, while acknowledging that the Suitsian incompatibility thesis is indefensible. Instead, Weatherson wants us to think about the rules of a sport 'not as binding constraints, but as providing reasons', that is "reasons against certain actions", where such 'reasons (...) can be outweighed by other considerations, but never defeated' (Weatherson 2022). This gives us Weatherson's default or quasi-incompatibility thesis, where players who break rules in certain ways are somehow not fully playing football, yet sort of playing football. This view falls prey to the same sort of objections as the Suitsian incompatibility thesis did. According to Weatherson, the default in football is not breaking the rules in certain ways, yet his view that 'players don't have to respect the referee, but they do have to respect the rules of the game' seems 'absurd, in light of the examples of gratuitous rule breaking' at the upper levels of the game (Weatherson 2022). There is no way out of this theoretical conundrum and Weatherson's move to view low-stakes football matches as the real football does not save him. The motivation behind the gambit of elevating low-stakes matches to the default or norm of what football and sport is seems to involve taking that which strikes one as very poor form in such games as a reliable guide to the ontological question of what it takes to be a footballer or to be playing football or, in Weatherson's case, to fully be a footballer or be fully playing football. This does not hold up to scrutiny. Not only is what is considered very poor form in a low-stakes park game something that need not be seen like that at the upper levels of football, such judgements may also vary within the same level of the game between different football cultures and different time periods of the game. Consider the latter regarding the rule-breaking act of handballing. In England in 1966, deliberate and shameless handling of the ball by an outfield player like Charlton was not frowned upon, while later the English developed a certain distaste for those kinds of breaches of the laws of the game. Yet the handballing English World Cup winners of 1966 and, say, a later version of the national team like the 1986 World Cup team, were certainly playing the same sport and equally count as footballers, even if their view of what was very poor form in football matches differed widely. The former was clearly comfortable with handballing in football matches, the latter maybe not so much. Furthermore, differences in judgement of very poor form when playing football between low- and high-stakes games can also be found with regard to such features as competitiveness, physicality and even football tactics. In a low-stakes game between friends in the park, very high competitiveness, hard physical challenges, or ultra-defensive tactics would, in my experience, most often not be welcomed. However, when tracking such differences in competitiveness, physicality or football tactics between low- and high-stakes matches and judgements of poor or very poor form, there is no temptation to

conclude that one or the other is really or fully football, while the other is not. As such, considerations about judgements of poor or very poor form in the game should be rejected as irrelevant to the question of what football or sport is and what it takes to play a sport like football.

What is relevant to the foundational issue is the balance between achieving both the prelusory goal of having a sport or a particular sport event to participate in and the lusory goal of winning that sport competition. If you have the prelusory goal of having a match to play, then you have a vested interest in having the rules implemented such that you can play in the football sport competition. Your prelusory goal provides reasons for implementing the rules of the sport such that you have a game to play. This is our foundational formalism and the minimal requirement of allowing, permitting or tolerating the rules to apply or take effect. If you, in a low-stakes park game, play as-if you are playing in the World Cup final, then you might find your prelusory goal destroyed by the manner in which you pursue the lusory goal of winning the match. In a park game, cheating like Charlton, Suárez or Weatherson's Lisa did might just cause the other players to abandon the sport event that you, through your conduct, were trying to win, thus ruining your chances of achieving that. Similarly, in a park game, tackling like a Duncan Ferguson or using ultra-defensive tactics and showing no interest in anything but defending might give a similar result. Wanting to have a game to play at this level of football gives reasons to avoid certain kinds of behaviour that, at this level, are considered very poor form. Your manner of trying to win will in such cases be self-defeating, if it causes the game to be abandoned. This explains the intuitive pull of the *Lisa's Wall Bounce and Arm Control Routines* case, as Lisa behaves in the manner that players at higher levels of the game would if they could, while situated by Weatherson in a park game. In a park game setting with low stakes, Lisa's routines might very well be sport-destroying, whereas they probably would not be had she pulled them off in a World Cup final. The prelusory goal of having a sport or a sport event, which is necessitated by it being an extra-ordinary activity or practice that will not occur unless we make it happen, gives us these kinds of concerns. If you wish to call this respect for the rules, as one of those concerns is having the rules implemented, thus making football possible, then you can. I don't mind either way. The important thing is that, by using the theoretical resources and tools from the book, we can explain what is going on in all of the Weatherson cases without having to appeal to any indefensible incompatibility thesis à la Suits (2005 (1978)) or Weatherson, where one ends up regarding players who are clearly part of a football match as either not being players at all or to some extent having ceased to be players. Regarding the latter, i.e. Weatherson's default or quasi-incompatibility thesis, we conclude that there is neither any really-not-compatible-with-playing-but-also-actually-playing nor to-some-extent-ceasing-to-be-a-player-but-also-to-some-extent-not-ceasing-to-be-a-player. Instead, we find the interplay in matches between the prelusory goal of having a match to play and the will to win required by the lusory attitude of footballers qua sport practitioners, and the book captures and explains that.

5. Conclusion

The great thing about Morgan's, Smith's and Weatherson's respective contributions to this symposium is that, apart from taking my views to task on various points, they also provide alternative ways of dealing with the issues being debated. Morgan gives us an ethical-

aesthetical view of our engagement and enjoyment of sports like football, Smith presents a Maslowian take on the way in which sports like football matter to us, and finally Weatherson suggests a default or quasi-incompatibility thesis with regard to how to be a sportsperson like a footballer and play a sport like football. I have tried to the best of my abilities to show that my theory of sport and football, as presented in *The Philosophy of Football*, withstands their critique as well as that it is preferable to the alternatives offered up by them. The degree to which I have succeeded is for others to evaluate. Perhaps the best one can hope for is to provide readers with a clearer understanding of the lay of the theoretical land with regard to the topics under investigation and of how the various philosophical positions fare within that area and in relation to each other.

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Notes

1. Kupfer is duly acknowledged in the book (Borge 2019a, 187, see also, Borge 2015, 119). However, all sports are competitive, so his notion of ‘competitive sports’ is descriptively inaccurate (Kupfer 1983, 114-124). This is why I introduce the label of ‘constructive-destructive sports’ (Borge 2019a, 107-110, 170-178). Notice also that my agon aesthetics covers all sports.
2. In my view, ‘unfair’ in this quote should be read as unethical or untoward conduct.
3. See Currie (2020, 9).
4. Pinpointing the utility of play, however, is difficult (Borge 2019a, 35).
5. Likewise, the death of Dobby matters to the girl, but from a developmental perspective, it is the fact that the child engages in certain ways with certain kinds of stories that matters.
6. In BBC’s football studio, when Denmark’s Christian Eriksen had collapsed on the pitch and received cardiopulmonary resuscitation in the match between Denmark and Finland July 12, 2021, Gary Lineker and his guests echoed Klopp’s sentiment. Lineker addressing former Spanish international Cesc Fàbregas said that ‘football doesn’t matter at the moment, does it. It really doesn’t’ to which Fàbregas answered ‘that’s exactly what I was thinking about (. . .) you realize that it’s just a game. You know, it’s a game and we need to enjoy it, every second, and have passion for it, but really there are things that doesn’t matter anymore, you know. More important is health, you know. Try to be always happy, you know, enjoy what you have in life, how blessed we are and that’s it. And this is just a big shock and a reminder for all of us’. This is in line with my treatment of the 2012 Fabrice Muamba incident (Borge 2019a, 217)
7. Even though Smith’s DDO view entails a rejection of the distinction between the ordinary world and the extra-ordinary world, here he seemingly agrees: ‘[t]he extra-ordinary world makes the ordinary world tolerable’ (Smith 2022). Notice as well that my view is that ‘[t]he extra-ordinary is not a world of its own that is totally cut off from the ordinary everyday world. There are no Chinese walls between the different realms of human existence’, which means that it is inaccurate to depict it as ‘the extra-ordinary world (. . .) sit[s] outside or on top of it [the ordinary world]’ (Borge 2019a, 54, Smith 2022).
8. Amendments must be made to factor in the presence of various types of league systems in some sports.
9. One might argue that, by the very same token, one should not count Mwepu Ilunga—in the *Curious Incident of Mwepu Ilunga Kicking the Ball Away* case—as playing football, because hoofing the ball away when the opposition is preparing to take a free kick also violates the requirement of endurance or tolerance of rule implementation (Borge 2019a, 167-170).

10. Not quite a fist bump, but notice how in the Euro 2020 semi-final between Spain and Italy seven minutes into extra-time, Italy's Rafael Tolói received a little clap or touch of hands from his teammate Jorginho as acknowledgment and thanks for a foul on Spain's Dani Olmo. Notice also that none on the pitch nor among the BBC commentators batted an eye with regard to this gesture, which according to Weatherson was very poor form, thought it did not bother anyone in this match.
11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bchn3tE1w98>.
12. Avoiding cards by putting on an apologetic display does not demonstrate that the Weatherson line is true. As for the high-profile case of Thierry Henry apologizing for his handball foul in the build-up to the French national team's goal against Ireland in their final qualification match for the World Cup in South Africa, a sobering exercise is to go through Henry's career with a special emphasis on other intentional fouls by the Frenchman that prompted public apologies. Perhaps something other than regret motivated Henry.
13. Johan Cruyff, a man not often associated with the dark arts of the sport, was quite clear in his endorsement of hard man and rabble-rouser Stoichkov as someone his so-called FC Barcelona dream team of the 1990s needed 'not only because of his footballing qualities, but also because of his character' (Cruyff with de Groot 2016, 134). See Borge (2019a, 255) for further elaboration.

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