



# The Philosophical Thoughts and Physical Education

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this paper is to briefly examine why people are interested in sport using ideas from the philosophy of sport and to propose recommendations for utilizing sport effectively in physical education programs. Chances are you have participated in or watched sport sometime in the past month or the past week or maybe even today. Have you ever wondered why people are interested in sport? Why do people participate in and/or watch sport when there are seemingly more important things to pursue (e.g., working, caring for family, serving in the community)? How can something like sport attract the attention and interest of so many people?. The philosophy of sport is an academic sub-discipline of kinesiology that examines the meaning and significance of sport, the relationships between sport and other practices such as art and play, the ethics of sport (e.g., fair play, cheating, PEDs), and other sport-related socio-political issues. The methods, insights and research found in the philosophy of sport can be used to investigate why people are interested in sport.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Thoughts, Physical education, Sports, Participations.

## I. Introduction

Since sport has a long history of being included in physical education programs, considering answers to the questions above is a valuable intellectual exercise for physical education professionals. The purpose of this editorial is to briefly examine why people are interested in sport using ideas from the philosophy of sport and to propose recommendations for utilizing sport effectively in physical education programs. Chances are you have participated in or watched sport sometime in the past month or the past week or maybe even today. Have you ever wondered why people are interested in sport? Why do people participate in and/or watch sport when there are seemingly more important things to pursue (e.g., working, caring for family, serving in the community)? How can something like sport attract the attention and interest of so many people?

## II. Review of Related Literature

The philosophy of sport is an academic sub-discipline of kinesiology that examines the meaning and significance of sport, the relationships between sport and other practices such as art and play, the ethics of sport (e.g., fair play, cheating, PEDs), and other sport-related socio-political issues. The methods, insights and research found in the philosophy of sport can be used to investigate why people are interested in sport.

## Peoples Interest and Sport

One of the main reasons people find sport interesting is because of its connection to play. But how is sport connected to play? As one philosopher of sport has observed, sport is a game of physical skill where participants “voluntarily attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles”. The “unnecessary obstacles” of sport are things such as manipulating a ball using the legs, feet, chest and head through a goal more times than an opponent (soccer); hitting a little ball with clubs until it gets in a hole and trying to do so in as few strokes as possible (golf); and striking a ball over a net and into an undefended area on the floor more times than an opponent (volleyball).

The whole purpose of sport is to pursue an artificial challenge that is outside the boundaries of real life, a challenge that is totally contrived. As a result, sport feels like a second or make-believe world. Both its nature and the attitude one needs to engage in it are deeply rooted in play. As a general rule, people do not pursue the goal of sport because they have to but rather because they want to. It is a fun, absorbing and exhilarating challenge. They choose to engage in sport for its own sake, as an end in itself. In these ways (among other ways, too), sport and play are closely related. In a world where boredom and monotony are not uncommon, people turn to sport as a way to invigorate, enliven and refresh themselves. Without question, people are interested in sport because — at its best — it is a form of play.

In addition to sport's connection to play, there are a number of other “goods” that can be experienced or obtained as a result of sport participation and/or involvement. The quest to acquire these goods is also a key reason why people play sport.

Philosophers differentiate between the goods of sport using the following two categories: 1. External goods of sports.

2. Internal goods of sports.

### 1. External goods of sports:

External goods are outcomes of sport participation such as better health or improved physical fitness, a sense of community by belonging to a team, making a living (or sometimes a fortune), becoming famous, and so on. These types of goods are not exclusive to sport. They can be realized or obtained through other means as well. For example, someone can improve health or physical fitness through exercise or eating better; a person can find community in a religious group or social club; people can become wealthy or famous via business, music, art, and politics. The point is that one does not have to participate in sport to achieve external goods. They can be secured in many other ways.

Some external goods found in sporting contexts are more easily obtained than others. Goods such as improved health and fitness, having fun, and making friends are accessible to anyone who participates in sport. These goods can (or should) happen for everyone. Other external goods, such as fame and fortune, are unattainable for most people who play sport because they are typically secured only by elite performers. Despite the low probability of obtaining fame and fortune through sport, the prospect of getting a college scholarship or becoming a professional athlete is very attractive to many.

What should be clear from the discussion of external goods is that sport participation and involvement can lead to outcomes that people want. Sport is popular because it can be used as a tool to get some other real good. Who doesn't want better health, quality friendships, a college scholarship, fame and/or fortune? While the external goods of sport are important and highly desirable, they do not, however, tell the whole story about the appeal of sport.

## 2. Internal goods of sports:

Internal goods are also reasons people are interested in and play sport. They are quite different from external goods. All runners would exclaim that running a personal best is sweet, even more sweet than just completing the race. Every golfer would proclaim a birdie is something “good” to experience. It feels different than a bogey or even a par. To the softball player, turning a double play is beautiful. As can be seen, internal goods can be achieved only in a specific sporting context where a player's performance is compared with the standards of excellence in a sport.

The standards of excellence are the ways a sport community defines quality play; they are achievements that can be realized only by participating in and performing the activity well. Furthermore, part of the process of achieving the standards of excellence is by seeing team/individual improvement even if current performance levels are not superior to another team/individual's performance. Also, experiencing the internal goods of sport is not only reserved for those who participate at the highest level of sport. Achievements are available at any level, even in recreational leagues, physical education classes, and pick-up games. A great offensive play in basketball (such as a “give and go” or a “no-look pass”) that leads to an easy basket is a great play regardless of whether it is performed in the NBA or a physical education class. Granted, the level of play (including the defence that resists the offense) is different, but excellence can be exemplified in both settings. More importantly, the experience is meaningful in both settings. The only real difference is the number of people who care about what happens on the court. In the case of the NBA millions of people care about the result, whereas not many (except for those participating) care about the result in a physical education class.

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I recently had a golf outing with my 11-year-old daughter that illustrates the process of experiencing the internal goods of sport. My daughter has played golf inconsistently with me the past few years. I taught her some of the basics such as the grip, chipping and putting, and the full swing, but not much else. This year I asked if she would like to play in a junior golf tournament for a new challenge. She agreed. We practiced a few times before her tournament, but nothing more. Her first tournament — a nine-hole event — opened her eyes to what was possible with the game. Even though she took last place, she came away from the experience with an enhanced vision of how golf could be played, the meaning it could produce, and the joy it could bring. She saw firsthand the skills and scores of the girls her age, and she resolved to improve. Every day following her first tournament, she asked me to take her to practice or play. We went golfing nearly every day over the next few weeks; her desire to learn and improve was very evident. She recently competed in her second tournament and scored a personal best nine-hole round and improved her score by multiple strokes. She finished in the middle of the girls her age. After her performance it was easy to discern the level of satisfaction she felt. Her efforts to practice led to improvement. After having experienced a few of the internal goods of golf such as hitting quality shots, making difficult putts, and posting a personal best golf score, her interest in golf is at an all-time high.

What should be readily apparent is that the internal goods of sport cannot be achieved in any way other than participating in a specific sport. In fact, these goods are meaningless anywhere and everywhere else in the world. Making a three-point shot in a close basketball game matters only in basketball, not in business or science or tennis. A person can obtain the internal goods of basketball on the basketball floor only by becoming a basketball player. Without question, people play sport to experience the unique joy and satisfaction that comes with playing a specific sport well. Such are the internal goods of sport.

Some people may question whether the internal goods of sport can be secured by students in physical education. However, plenty of research and personal accounts show that it is possible. Students love to “score goals,” “make baskets,” “intercept passes,” “win points,” and so on. The prospect of experiencing the internal goods of sport, even in physical education, is very appealing to students. Therefore, both teachers and students are responsible for manufacturing legitimate opportunities for *all* students to experience and achieve the internal goods of sport.

### **Suggestions for Physical Education Teacher**

While the popularity of sport is indisputable, this does not mean that *all* students in physical education will be naturally or immediately drawn to or have an interest in sport. Initial reluctance or disinterest from some students should not deter teachers from including sport in physical education programs. After all, not all students are immediately interested in math or Shakespeare or science either. If sport is important, and it is, a love for it needs to be nurtured in all students, even the most reluctant or sceptical. Here are a few recommendations to guide this process.

**1. Use Sport Education:** The curriculum and instruction model known as sport education is designed to create an authentic sport experience in the context of physical education. It emphasizes the key features of sport such as seasons, team affiliation, formal competition, culminating events, record keeping, and festivity. These features distinguish SE from the commonly used multi-activity curriculum model where students only practice or play a specific sport for short periods of time. Seasons in SE are significantly longer, allowing more time for students to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to become “competent, literate, and enthusiastic” sports people. In short, SE provides legitimate opportunities for students to experience the internal goods of sport. A number of books and articles have been written about SE. Physical education teachers should take the time to study and learn how to implement SE effectively. The resources are out there.

**2. Be Patient and Persistent:** Achieving or experiencing the internal goods of sport, for most students, does not happen quickly and easily. Growing an interest in a specific sport takes time and effort; it also requires involvement in a sport community that already values the challenge of the game and understands its internal goods. Teachers and students must commit to the process and be patient through the ups and downs of teaching and learning the skills, history and traditions of a sport. While sport is closely connected to play, this does not mean it will always be something students want to do. Students should be taught that learning how to play a sport is not always going to be fun; it takes consistent and concerted effort for a sport to become something meaningful. Generally speaking, the goods of sport are earned more than simply had.

**3. Utilize Students Who Already Have an Interest in a Sport:** Some students who attend physical education already have an interest in a specific sport. Their interest, knowledge and skills can be utilized to create a better experience for all students in a class. When these students know a goal of the class is to assist others less familiar with the sport to develop the skills to play the game, they are likely to provide ideas related to performance cues, skill challenges/drills, and lead-up or small-sided games. This is one way to show students that teaching and learning are the responsibility not only of the teacher but everyone in a class. There is an increased likelihood of experiencing the internal goods of a specific sport when students are more involved in the teaching process.

**4. Match Students Appropriately for Game Play:** How students are placed in groups for game play is a very important consideration when the goal is to help students experience the internal goods of sport. Sometimes it may be best for students to play a sport with others of similar skill abilities (homogenous grouping); other times, it may be best for students to play with others who have more skill (heterogeneous grouping). The point is to take the time to prepare grouping combinations thoughtfully and to give student various kinds of experiences.

**5. Create Multiple Opportunities to Participate in Sport:** There are a number of ways physical education teachers can create opportunities for students to participate in sport beyond physical education class time, such as before- and after-school clubs, intramurals, and pick-up games during recess or lunch breaks. While these programs will require some upfront work, they can be excellent ways for many students to grow their competence in and love for sport. Delegating administrative and supervisory responsibilities to other faculty/staff, parent volunteers, and even students can make the administration of these programs more manageable.

**6. Share Opportunities to Participate in Sport:** Advertise opportunities to participate in sport outside of school-sponsored programs such as city recreation leagues, pick-up games, tournaments, and other programs. Use a few minutes at the beginning of class, one day a week, to announce these opportunities. Post fliers in and around the gymnasium or school. Post information on social media sites. All of these strategies will increase student awareness of these programs and increase participation. The bottom line is students need to be continually reminded of opportunities in the community to participate in sport. Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to periodically discuss their experiences in other sport programs during physical education class.

### III. Conclusion

Sport is popular across the world. While the appeal of sport may vary across cultures and individuals, there are clear reasons why sport is interesting to so many people. Ideas from the philosophy of sport, such as the connection between sport and play and the external and internal goods of sport, offer insights into the allure of sport. Physical education teachers should accept and embrace the challenge to help students of all ability levels become lovers of sport.

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