1. The Question of Play

Except for the people who depend on them for their livelihood, sports, like all other forms of recreation, presumably exist for no other reason than to provide enjoyment. Thus we are led to ask whether competition truly represents the most enjoyable arrangement we can imagine in a recreational setting. Let us narrow the question by first considering the phenomenon of play, which might be thought of as enjoyment in its purest form. One of the classic works on the subject, Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, goes so far as to suggest that play and competition are virtually synonymous. Other students of play, such as Roger Caillois and Jean Piaget, have treated competition as a kind of play, if not its prototype. I want to challenge not only Huizinga’s extreme position but even the weaker claim that competition and play are compatible. To do so, it makes sense to begin by defining play.

A review of the literature discloses considerable overlap—which is not to say consensus—among previous efforts. Huizinga, who goes on to argue that play is the touchstone of civilization itself, offers a rather broad definition. He proposes that play is “a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious,’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly . . . occurring within certain limits of space, time, and meaning, according to fixed rules.” The critical part of this definition, I think, is the reference to freedom. Play must be chosen voluntarily, and it is chosen because it is pleasing. Other activities are commended to us because of their utility, their instrumental worth. Play, by contrast, is intrinsically gratifying; it is an end in itself. We do not play in order to master a particular skill or to perform well, although these may be adventitious results. Results will not matter, in other words, if we love what we are doing for its own sake. (That this idea seems peculiar, if not unnerving, to us is evidence of how little room our worldview makes for play.)

Play represents a “process orientation,” a concern for what one is doing in itself, as opposed to a “product orientation,” in which one’s activity is justified by what it contributes to some other goal. Play, quite justifiably conceived as the opposite of work, has no goal other than itself.

This is not to say that play cannot turn out to be useful or cannot be encouraged for heuristic purposes. Adults, who are typically less process-oriented than children, often read serious business into children’s play. It is seen as (1) an opportunity for the player to experiment with roles and cultural norms, develop the ego, and enhance a sense of personal competence; (2) an opportunity for the player to work through unconscious fears; (3) a diagnostic tool by which the psychotherapist can gain access to the child’s inner life; and (4) a way to instill certain values in a child. The player, though, does not engage in play for these purposes—or for any purpose except to have fun. As soon as play becomes product-oriented or otherwise extrinsically motivated, it ceases to be play.
Two final points need to be made about the nature of play. First, while we sometimes speak of play as relaxing, it tends not to be homeostatic (that is, motivated by a need to produce a state of rest or balance). On the contrary, the person at play delights in seeking out challenges and overcoming them. Second, while all human behavior is in some sense rule-governed, and while we can and do play within specific structures, the tendency of play to be free suggests that it is also more or less spontaneous. Thus, rules, while not precisely inimical to play, may frustrate its purest expression. An activity might be said to approximate play in inverse proportion to the extent to which it is rule-bound.

Huizinga was probably not the first and certainly not the last to complain that "with the increasing systematization and regimentation of sport, something of the pure play-quality is inevitably lost. . . . The real play-spirit is threatened with extinction." He wrote that in 1944, and books lamenting sport's fall from grace, as it were, are still being published regularly. The diminution of playfulness is often high on the list of grievances. It is said that our leisure activities no longer give us a break from the alienating qualities of the work we do; instead, they have come to resemble that work. The chief reason our recreation is like our work is that it has become more competitive. But sports, by definition, have always been competitive. By virtue of this fact, sports never really qualified as play in the first place. Although it is not generally acknowledged, most definitions of play do seem to exclude competitive activities. First, competition is always highly rule-governed. Second, competition often is motivated by a search for approval, which is an extrinsic motivator and thus irrelevant to play. Third, and most important, competition is goal-oriented striving par excellence. [Michael Novak, who wrote The Joy of Sports,] is quite right to insist that "play is to be played exactly because it isn't serious; it frees us from seriousness." Competition, though, is very serious indeed—unavoidably so. Consider the following passage from Joseph Heller's novel Something Happened, in which a school gym teacher is complaining to the narrator about the behavior of the latter's son:

"I try to give him a will to win. He don't have one. . . . He passes the basketball deliberately—he does it deliberately, Mr. Slocum, I swear he does. Like a joke. He throws it away—to some kid on the other team just to give him a chance to make some points or to surprise the kids on his own team. For a joke. That's some joke, isn't it? . . . When he's ahead in one of the relay races, do you know what he does? He starts laughing. He does that. And then slows down and waits for the other guys to catch up. Can you imagine? The other kids on his team don't like that. That's no way to run a race. Mr. Slocum. Would you say that's a way to run a race?"

"No." I shake my head and try to bury a smile. Good for you kid, I want to cheer out loud . . . for I can visualize my boy clearly far out in front in one of his relay races, laughing that deep, reverberating, unrestrained laugh that sometimes erupts from him, staggering with merriment as he toils to keep going and motioning liberally for the other kids in the race to catch up so they can all laugh together and run alongside each other as they continue their game (after all, it is only a game)."
Contrast the whimsical, mischievous, other-affirming, spur-of-the-moment delight depicted here with the grim, determined athletes who memorize plays and practice to the point of exhaustion in order to beat an opposing team. Clearly competition and play tug in two different directions. If you are trying to win, you are not engaged in true play. Several investigators have come to just this conclusion. M. J. Ellis, in his study of play, writes that “feelings of power, trophies, or money for the winners . . . are extrinsic to the process. To the degree that competition is sustained by extrinsic pressures, it is not play. . . . In this sense, competition and play are antithetical.” But we do not even need to point to the trophies and the money. The very experience of having beaten someone else is extrinsic to the process itself. The presence of this reward structure in competition disqualifies it as play.

William A. Sadler, finally, notes that sports not only are not isolated from daily life (as play must be), but they actively train participants for that life as it is lived in our society.

Athletes often are well aware that what they do is not play [he writes]. Their practice sessions are workouts; and to win the game they have to work harder. Sports are not experienced as activities outside the institutional pattern of the American way of life; they are integrally a part of it. . . . In other words, the old cliche is true: “Sports prepare one for life.” The question which must be raised is: “What kind of life?” The answer in an American context is that they prepare us for a life of competition.

Competitive recreation is anything but a time-out from goal-oriented activities. It has an internal goal, which is to win. And it has an external goal, which is to train its participants. Train them to do what? To accept a goal-oriented model. Sports is thus many steps removed from play.

The argument here is not merely academic. Even when they do not talk explicitly about play, apologists for sport like to argue that it offers a “time out” from the rest of life. No matter how brutal or authoritarian sports might be, we are supposed to see them as taking place in a social vacuum. This claim has the effect of excusing whatever takes place on a playing field. (While governor of California, Ronald Reagan reportedly advised a college football team that they could “feel a clean hatred for [their] opponent. It is a clean hatred since it’s only symbolic in a jersey.”) It also has the effect of obscuring the close relationship between competitive recreation and the society that endorses it.

That relationship, as Sadler saw, is reciprocal. Sports not only reflect the prevailing mores of our society but perpetuate them. They function as socializing agents, teaching us the values of hierarchical power arrangements and encouraging us to accept the status quo. In a 1981 study of children’s competitive soccer and hockey programs in New York and Connecticut, Gai Ingham Berlage was even more specific: “The structural organization of [these] programs resembles the structural organization of American corporations. . . . The values stressed in children’s competitive sports are also similar to corporate values.” It is hardly a coincidence,
then, that the most vigorous supporters of competitive sports — those who not only enjoy but explicitly defend them — are political conservatives (Michael Novak, Spiro Agnew, and William J. Bennett are among those quoted in these pages) or that interest in sports is highest in the more politically conservative regions of the country. 16

Writing in the *Journal of Physical Education and Recreation*, George Sage observed that

organized sport — from youth programs to the pros — has nothing at all to do with playfulness — fun, joy, self-satisfaction — but is, instead, a social agent for the deliberate socialization of people into the acceptance of . . . the prevailing social structure and their fate as workers within bureaucratic organizations. Contrary to the myths propounded by promoters, sports are instruments not for human expression, but of social stasis. 17

Sport does not simply build character, in other words; it builds exactly the kind of character that is most useful for the social system. From the perspective of our social (and economic) system — which is to say, from the perspective of those who benefit from and direct it — it is useful to have people regard each other as rivals. Sports serve the purpose nicely, and athletes are quite deliberately led to accept the value and naturalness of an adversarial relationship in place of solidarity and collective effort. If he is in a team sport, the athlete comes to see cooperation only as a means to victory, to see hostility and even aggression as legitimate, to accept conformity and authoritarianism. Participation in sports amounts to a kind of apprenticeship for life in contemporary America, or, as David Riesman put it, "The road to the board room leads through the locker room." 18

One of the least frequently noticed features of competition — and, specifically, of its product-orientation — is the emphasis on quantification. 19 In one sense, competition is obviously a process of ranking: who is best, second-best, and so forth. But the information necessary to this process is itself numerical. There are exceptions — one can usually determine who crosses the finish line first just by watching, for example — but competition usually is wedded to specific measures of how much weight, how many baskets, how much money, and so on. Competition not only depends on attention to numbers — it shapes and reinforces that attention. By competing, we become increasingly reliant on quantification, adopting what one thinker calls a "prosaic mentality" in the course of reducing things to what can be counted and measured — a phenomenon that obviously extends well beyond the playing field. 20 Play, by contrast, is not concerned with quantifying because there is no performance to be quantified. Like the seven-year-old athlete who was asked how fast he had run and replied, "As fast as I could," 21 the process-oriented individual gladly gives up precision — particularly precision in the service of determining who is best — in exchange for pure enjoyment. He who plays does not ask the score. In fact, there is no score to be kept.

Within the confines of a competitive game, finally, there exists a phenomenon that could be called "process competition." This is the in-the-moment experience of struggling for superiority that is sometimes seen as an end in itself rather than simply a step toward the final victory. Thus, college football coach Joe Paterno: "We strive to be Number One . . . But win or lose, it is the competition which
gives us pleasure."22 For enjoyment to derive wholly from the process of besting another person is more than a little disturbing, but it does more nearly qualify as play since it is a process. What we need to ask is whether it really is the essence of competitive recreation. After waxing rhapsodic over process competition, Stuart Walker writes: "The philosophy [athletes] hear announced is that the game's the thing, participation is what matters. But the questions they hear asked are, Who beat whom? Who got the medals? . . . The modern competitor feels that to be approved, admired, respected, he must win."23 In fact, there is nothing especially modern about this phenomenon. The concern with who beat whom—the "product" of the event—is hardly an accidental feature of competition: it is not an afterthought that just receives too much attention these days. To structure an event as a competition is often to cause participants to struggle against each other in-the-moment, but it is first and foremost to designate a goal: victory. Any gratification from the game itself can be expected to diminish when an external reward (victory with its trappings) is introduced. And there is no competition without such reward. Overall, then, we must conclude that the pure pleasure of play excludes sports and all other competitive activities.

2. Fun without Competition

The popularity of sports does not seem to depend on whether they qualify as play. Enthusiasts of such competitive recreation often specify—and commend to us—its unique advantages, so these qualities bear close examination. They are as follows:

Exercise. The player improves his or her overall fitness, strength, and coordination.

Teamwork. Team sports are said to promote a kind of group loyalty and esprit de corps that can come only from working toward a common end such as the defeat of the opposing team.

Zest. Without competition, we are sometimes told, recreational activities would hold no interest for us. Even critic George Leonard concedes that competition, "like a little salt . . . adds zest to the game and to life itself."24 Betty Lehan Harragan uses the identical metaphor: "The competitive impulse adds salt and pepper, the spices, to an otherwise bland and tasteless dish of aimless exercise. . . . Competition is what makes it all worthwhile."25

Pushing Oneself. In striving to win, the competitor is said to test his or her limits, to feel invigorated from the challenge, to experience a sense of sweaty accomplishment that is immensely gratifying.

Strategy. Against an opponent, one has to think on one's feet as well as move them. To anticipate and counter the other's moves is to overcome an obstacle, which can be a lot of fun.
Total Involvement. Sports aficionados frequently describe the complete experiential engagement that they enjoy, the sense of having transcended time. This theme is enthusiastically sounded in two books written as paean to sports: The Joy of Sports by Michael Novak and Winning: The Psychology of Competition by Stuart Walker, a doctor whose free time is spent on competitive sailing. The same concept is described by several psychologists: Abraham Maslow’s “peak experiences” involve just such an unselfconsciously immersive.

Existential Affirmation. In sweeping, almost mystical language, several sports enthusiasts maintain that while competing one tastes perfection, asserts one’s freedom, and triumphs over death. For Walker, the competitor “enters a world of challenge, risk, and uncertainty and for a few moments re-creates it in accordance with his own design.” For Novak, the winner wrestles with “being” and “non-being.” “Each time one enters a contest, one’s unseen antagonist is death. . . . [It is the exercise of freedom . . . against the darkness.” One becomes “more than self,” “expressing the highest human cravings for perfection.” For Gary Warner, competition is “so valuable [because] . . . every life needs moments of exultation.” And for A. Bartlett Giamatti, former president of Yale University, winning has “a joy and discrete purity to it that cannot be replaced by anything else.”

Thrill of Victory. Some people, finally, report that beating someone else is an intrinsically, irreducibly satisfying experience.

A careful analysis of these enjoyment reveals that none of them (except the last) actually requires competition. William Sadler put it well:

We should not make the mistake of equating meeting a challenge with competition. There are many sports which can be exciting, can test the abilities and skills of individuals and groups, can bring harmony and happiness, can provide healthy exercise and an exhilarating change from the workaday world, can reunite persons with nature, can express . . . the highest human values, which do not require competition.

Let us take each advantage in turn.

Exercise. First, physical fitness obviously does not require competition—or even any rule-governed game. As the recent popularity of aerobics and other non-competitive approaches to exercise makes clear, one can get a fine workout without a win/lose structure.

Teamwork. Second, the camaraderie that results from teamwork is precisely the benefit of cooperative activity, whose very essence is working together for a common goal. Intergroup competition—the creation of a common enemy, [an Us-versus-Them] dynamic—is not necessary for group feeling. The distinguishing feature of team competition is that a given player works with and is encouraged to feel warmly toward only half of those present, so cooperative activities are twice as desirable if this is our criterion. (This comparison actually understates the case.
since it does not account for the suspicion of, contempt for, and even violence toward one's opponents that one finds in team sports.)

*Zest.* As for the claim that competition, like salt, provides zest, the metaphor may be more apt than its proponents intended. Salt contributes to hypertension and also becomes a substitute for the natural flavor of the food itself. Only when we come to depend on salt does food seem bland without it. Similarly, competitive games create something very like an addiction so that recreation without the possibility of victory becomes less exciting. "It is not only work that is poisoned by the philosophy of competition," wrote Bertrand Russell, "leisure is poisoned just as much. The kind of leisure which is quiet and restoring to the nerves comes to be felt boring." 31

*Pushing Oneself.* The dependence on sports to provide a sense of accomplishment or to test one's wits is similarly misplaced. One can aim instead at an objective standard or attempt to exceed one's own previous record—the latter being what some people mean by the unfortunate phrase "competing with oneself." Such non-competitive striving can be very satisfying indeed, and cooperative games requiring skill and stamina similarly seem no less invigorating for the absence of a winner and a loser at the end.

*Strategy.* These games, as I will show shortly, often involve considerable strategy, proving that the obstacle to be overcome need not be another person. If large numbers of people defend competition because they want to be challenged, this cannot be surprising: it is the same confusion between achievement and competition that we have encountered before, and it is understandable given the hegemony of competitive games in our culture. Within such a game, striving is striving for victory, so someone who knows only competitive games will come to equate the two.

*Total Involvement.* The engagement that includes transcending time does not require physical activity of any sort, let alone competitive activity in particular. It may be possible to achieve this sensation in competition (including in battle), then, but one hardly needs to compete in order to experience it.

*Existential Affirmation.* Precisely the same is true of the grander claims made to the effect that sports represent an existential triumph. Anyone oriented toward spirituality to the extent that playing football becomes a religious experience is likely to find many activities have a similar effect. Rebell ing against death and flexing one's freedom, meanwhile, were central themes for Albert Camus, but his attention was directed toward love and creation, and toward rebellion against injustice, as the means for living these things. Camus's later works reflect a special emphasis on the need to work with others and affirm their humanity as part of our own expression; this principle is reflected in the writing of such religious ex-
Istentialists as Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel, both of whom probably would have been appalled to hear competition cited as an example of affirmation and transcendence.

_Thrill of Victory._ This leaves only "thrill of victory": the last justification that it feels good to prove oneself better than someone else, to succeed by making another player or team fail. In practice, it is difficult to isolate this rationale from the others; the gratification thought to result from competition itself can in many cases be traced to a feature that actually does not require competition at all. Thus, it is difficult to know how widespread is the irrefutable enjoyment of beating other people. To whatever extent it does exist, though, we cannot just assert that someone who claims that this does bring him pleasure is mistaken: "You only think it's fun." On the other hand, it is quite appropriate to explore the psychological dynamics of such enjoyment. The pure pleasure of competitive triumph is first cousin to the pleasure of punching someone in a state of manic excitement. Perhaps the best we can do in either case is to insist that because of both its psychological origins and its consequences to all parties concerned, this is a pleasure we should not nurture and encourage. Both as individuals and as members of a society, we would do better to take our enjoyments from more constructive (or at least less destructive) pursuits. The free-time activities we set up for ourselves and our children ought not to reflect and perpetuate our least admirable inclinations.

We do not need to try to beat other people in order to have a good time. Why, then, are competitive games so popular? The first response is that the extent of their popularity may not be so great as we imagine, at least if participation is our standard of measure. Some people, of course, avoid or drop out of sports because of disabilities, other interests, an aversion to exercise, and so forth. But a huge proportion dislike such activities precisely because they are competitive. "For many children competitive sports operate as a failure factory which not only effectively eliminates the 'bad ones' but also turns off many of the 'good ones,'" writes sports psychologist Terry Orlick. "In North America it is not uncommon to lose from 80 to 90 percent of our registered organized sports participants by 15 years of age." Research in nonrecreational settings clearly shows that those who are not successful in initial competitions continue to perform poorly, thereby setting up a vicious cycle. Other research suggest that these individuals drop out when given the chance.

Many people who defend competition actually encourage this, invoking a "survival of the fittest" ethic. School athletic programs implicitly do likewise, concentrating resources where the very best athletes are. Expressions of indifference or even satisfaction when many participants drop out of a given activity are disturbing under any circumstances, but they seem particularly outrageous when it comes to recreation. What, after all, is the point of games if not to encourage widespread participation and enjoyment? This sort of attitude has become self-defeating.
moreover, since many accomplished (or potentially excellent) athletes find the competitive pressure distasteful and onerous enough to bail out.

The situation has reached the point that dozens of magazine articles and popular books are published every year decrying the excessive competitiveness of children's athletic programs, such as Little League baseball. The spectacle of frantic, frothing parents humiliating their children in their quest for vicarious triumph is, of course, appalling, and the cheating and violence that result will be explored in a later chapter. For now, consider the simple fact that these experiences with competition are so unpleasant as to lead uncounted children to leave sports permanently.

Is this mass exodus a bad thing? Unlike most critics, I am not at all sure that it is. In order to regret the fact that children are turned off to sports, you must assume that competition itself is unobjectionable if not delightful—and that potential athletes are alienated only because they receive too large a dose. I propose instead that while ill effects increase in direct proportion to the extent of competitiveness in an activity, it is competition itself that is to blame (although its effect will depend on an individual's temperament and specific experiences). There is no threshold of competitiveness below which we could expect all children to enjoy sports. From this position, it follows that disaffection with sports should not occasion regret on our part—unless children generalize their reaction to all physical activity.

My point in showing that the competitive dimension of sports is creating millions of future ex-jocks is not to argue that this is a tragedy but only to show that the link between competition and fun is largely spurious. Some people quit sports outright, while others may continue participating from force of habit, out of an unrelenting need to demonstrate their competence, or for any one of a number of other reasons that have little to do with genuine enjoyment. For all the emphasis on competitive recreation in our culture, then, its popularity is not what it first appears.

But what of those who do enjoy such activities? A cross-cultural perspective is helpful here, reminding us that the members of some societies not only cooperate in their work but also enjoy noncompetitive pastimes. The unavoidable implication is that we are socialized to regard competition as an indispensable part of having a good time. We have been raised to associate recreation with the win/lose model that pervades our society, to assume that having fun means someone has to wind up a loser. We enjoy what we have been brought up to enjoy. A child in our culture knows without thinking how he is supposed to have fun with his friends: play a game whose structure requires that not everyone can be successful. When he does not play, he goes to watch other people play such games. This socialization is so thorough that alternatives to competitive recreation are almost inconceivable to many of us. "How can it be a game if no one wins?" we ask, with genuine puzzlement—the same puzzlement occasioned by talk of cooperative education.

In resisting competitive recreation, most liberal-minded writers have implicitly or explicitly suggested that we should place less emphasis on winning. We can stop keeping score, for example, and try to shift our focus from winning to hav-
ing fun. "Every young athlete should be judged only on his own or her own," sports psychologists Thomas Tutko and William Bruns urge. "They should not be measured in terms of how they do as compared to others." This amounts to suggesting that we be less intentionally competitive even within a structurally competitive environment. Like most reformist approaches to systemic problems, this recommendation is likely to be limited in its effectiveness. Where we are unable or unwilling to abandon competitive games, minimizing the importance of who wins and who loses does indeed make sense. But the usefulness of this approach depends on the kind of game involved.

It is relatively easy to stop keeping score in golf, which consists of two or more people taking turns at independent pursuits and then comparing their success at the end. A more interdependent competitive activity, however, makes this far more difficult, if not impossible: "One simply cannot expect two tennis players to place their shots in such a position, provided they did possess the necessary skill, as to assist in the increased development of the opponent. This is simply not the reason for the sport as we know it today. The name of the game is win." It is not merely that tennis is structured so that only one player can win in the end, but that in each instant of play success consists in hitting the ball so that one's opponent is unable to return it. All team sports, as well as most competitive indoor games (e.g., chess, poker), are more like tennis than like golf. In such cases, well-meaning exhortations to be less competitive seem naive at best.

To say we find competition enjoyable because we are socialized to do so is not merely to say that we teach our children to want to win, but that we offer them games where the whole point is to win. The only real alternative is noncompetitive games, and children, as we saw earlier, generally prefer these games once they are exposed to them—an extraordinarily suggestive finding.

But how are such games played? All games involve achieving a goal despite the presence of an obstacle; in football, for example, the goal is to move a ball from one point to another, and the obstacle is the other team. In noncompetitive games, the obstacle is something intrinsic to the task itself rather than another person or persons. If coordinated effort is required to achieve the goal, then the game becomes not merely noncompetitive but positively cooperative. Such coordination invariably involves the presence of rules. While competitive activities are particularly dependent on rules—and inflexible rules, at that—it is not the case that the only alternative to competition is the "Caucus-race" described in Alice in Wonderland, in which participants "began running when they liked, and left off when they liked." While such an activity more closely approximates pure play, noncompetitive games are generally rule-governed. Thus, the presence of rules does not imply the presence of competition.

Partly because they do have rules, noncompetitive games can be at least as challenging as their competitive counterparts. They are also a good deal of fun, and, like the Caucus-race, can have the happy result that "Everybody has won and all must have prizes." Consider musical chairs, an American classic for small children. In this game, 

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lost—and have been sitting on the sidelines for varying lengths of time, excluded from play. Terry Orlick proposes instead that when a chair is removed after each round, the players should try to find room on the chairs that remain—a task that becomes more difficult and more fun as the game progresses. The final result is a group of giggling children crowded onto a single chair.

This is only one of hundreds of noncompetitive games that Orlick has invented or discovered, and they have been collected in The Cooperative Sports and Games Book (1978) and The Second Cooperative Sports and Games Book (1982). Another good collection is Jeffrey Sobel’s Everybody Wins: Non-competitive Games for Young Children (1983). As early as 1950, Theodore F. Lentz and Ruth Cornelius published their own manual of cooperative games. Among them are Cooperative Chinese Checkers, the object of which is not to move one’s marbles faster than the other player but to coordinate the two players’ movements so that they reach their respective home sections simultaneously. In Cooperative Bowling, similarly, the purpose is to “knock down the ten pins in as many rounds as there are players”—a very challenging task indeed.41 Other cooperative games requires that each player make a specified contribution to the goal, that all the players attempt to reach a certain score (as in Cooperative Shuttleboard, which requires a modified court), or that all players work together against a time limit. Orlick also has defused the competitive element in more traditional games by manipulating the scoring procedures or constitution of teams. In “Bump and Scoot” volleyball, for example, a player who hits the ball over the net immediately moves to the other side. “The common objective [is] to make a complete change in teams with as few drops of the ball as possible.”42 A small family business in Ontario, Canada, called Family Pastimes manufactures about 50 indoor games for adults and children, including cooperative versions of chess, backgammon, go, Scrabble, and Monopoly. There may well be other such publications and products, but with a little ingenuity anyone can invent or reinvent many such games. Change the rules of Scrabble, for example, so that the two players try to obtain the highest possible combined score. Allow each to see the other’s letters. The game is at least as challenging with this adaptation, given that one must be thinking about saving certain spaces on the board for one’s partner and anticipating later developments from a joint perspective.

Note the significance of an “opponent” becoming a “partner.” This is far more than a semantic transformation.
the entire dynamic of the game shifts, and one's attitude toward the other player(s) changes with it. Even the friendliest game of tennis cannot help but be affected by the game's inherent structure, as described earlier. The two players are engaged in an activity that demands that each try to make the other fail. The good feeling that attends a cooperative game—the delight one is naturally led to take in another player's success —may cast in sharper relief the posture one routinely adopts toward other players in competitive games—perhaps without even being aware of it. Cooperative recreation can, in other words, allow us to experience retrospectively just why competition is less enjoyable—and less innocuous—than we may have otherwise assumed.

Notes

1. Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: "The ways in which men compete for superiority are as various as the prizes at stake... But in whatever shape it comes, it is always play" (p. 105). And again: "... competition implies play" (p. 133).
2. M. J. Ellis's Why People Play offers a reasonably good review of selected definitions and theories of play—definitions and theories being difficult to disentangle—although the review is colored by his strong behaviorist bias.
3. Huizinga, pp. 11, 203.
5. "The child must somehow distance himself from the content of his unconscious and see it as something external to him, to gain any sort of mastery over it. In normal play, objects such as dolls and toy animals are used to embody various aspects of the child's personality which are too complex, unacceptable, and contradictory for him to handle" (Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment, p. 55).
6. Orlick, for instance, suggests that we help children play in such a way that they will learn to be honest and cooperative (Winning Through Cooperation, pp. 138–39). It might be noted that such inoculation of values takes place, willy-nilly, whenever we guide—or react to—our children's play. It is just that we are accustomed to sexist roles, competitive interactions, and so forth, so we are less likely to notice the ways in which most play (as well as stories and films) quietly perpetuates these values.
7. Whether humans are primarily motivated to reduce tension, as psychoanalysts and behaviorists alike maintain, is actually a controversial question in personality theory. Among those who argue that we evidence a "resistance to equilibrium" is Gordon Allport (see, for example, his Becoming).
8. Huizinga, pp. 197, 199.
12. Ellis, p. 140.
16. "Sport is a primary vehicle through which youth are socialized to accept and internalize American values," wrote D. Stanley Etizen. "Thus, sport is viewed as the darling of the conservatives and the culprit of radicals" (Sport and Contemporary Society, p. 90). Gerald Ford could be added to the list of conservative defenders of competition. "Broadly speaking," he wrote while president.
"outside of a national character and an educated society, there are few things more important to a country's growth and well-being than competitive athletics" ("In Defense of the Competitive Urge," p. 17). The mention of regional differences in sport appreciation is based on Gallup Poll results, cited in Edwards, p. 92.

18. Rieman cited in Tutko and Bruns, p. 42.
19. Arnold V. Tarentino has discussed this issue in "The Sports Record Mania: An Aspect of Alienation."
20. George W. Morgan, The Human Predicament, esp. pp. 82-93. Alongside the prosaic man's predilection for quantification, according to Morgan, is his inability to tolerate ambiguity or uniqueness, his fascination with technique, and his need to classify (and, finally, to control) whatever he experiences. The poet e.e. cummings was characteristically more blunt: "Nothing measurable matters a very good god damn."
22. Ibid., p. 205.
24. Leonard, p. 47. But, he continues, "when the seasoning is mistaken for substance, only sickness can follow." (Ibid.).
25. Betty Lehan Harragan, Games Mother Never Taught You, p. 78.
26. Walker, p. 3.
29. Giarni is quoted by John Underwood, "A Game Plan for America," p. 67. In Toward a Philosophy of Sport, Harold J. Vanderzwaag tried to develop an explicitly existentialist justification for sports, but he based this on the mistaken view that existentialism is a philosophy of individualism and the present moment. (Regarding this confusion, see my essay, "Existentialism Here and Now," esp. pp. 381-88.)
30. Sadler, pp. 173-74. Whether we can reasonably speak of sports achieving these goals without competition is questionable, given our nomenclature. For "sports" in his quotation, read: "types of recreation" or "ways to have fun."
33. Johnson and Johnson, "Structure."
34. Schmitt, p. 672.
35. Tutko and Bruns, p. 202; emphasis in original. This is the thrust of the author's entire last chapter, "Alternate [sic] Models and Approaches."
39. The examples that follow in the text substantiate this. Rivka R. Eifermann's study of some 14,000 Israeli children decisively refutes the belief of Piaget and others that "rules and competition necessarily go together." She points to the existence of "cooperative rule-governed games" as well as "individual games governed by rules" (pp. 276, 278). Interestingly, Eifermann's exhaustive study also found, "contrary to Piaget's explicit statement... and, indeed, to what is probably a rather general assumption, [that] there is a relative decline in participation" in competitive, rule-governed games as children grow older, after reaching a peak in fourth grade (Ibid., pp. 279-80). In his review of Eifermann's work, M. J. Ellis explains that "the uncertainty inherent in traversing from response to outcome is motivating in itself, and sustains much of the behavior of older children. They do not need explicit rules and competitions to govern their play behavior" (p. 69).
40. Carroll, p. 13
41. Lentz and Cornelius, p. 4.