

# Huge Week

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
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I'm just now getting into the World Cup as the recent sports calendar has been overloaded with prime events. With the battle for Lord Stanley's Cup raging on, the NBA Finals testing the bounds of credulity, and the U.S. Open Golf Tournament on the menu, trying to fit the World Cup into my thoughts and my schedule was nearly too much to manage. Perhaps foolishly, I will try to do some justice to each of these penultimate sporting events here.

Where to begin? For me it has to be the final round of the National Hockey League playoffs, the Battle for the Stanley Cup. The run to the finals by both the Los Angeles Kings and the New York Rangers seemed improbable. In the case of the Rangers about ten days before the playoffs began it looked like Ranger players would be booking tee times at their favorite courses as soon as the regular season ended. Then having made the playoffs the Rangers had to navigate their way through Pennsylvania, both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, followed by the high flying Montreal Canadians. Not many of the experts or even Ranger partisans were predicting such a run.

As for the Kings they achieved what looked like the impossible coming back in round one from a 0-3 deficit by winning their next four games against the San Jose Sharks, overcoming odds that have been achieved in only a handful of playoffs in any sport. In round two the Kings faced elimination in both game six and seven by the Anaheim Ducks. They won both games to move on. Then they went up against Chicago in another seven game series in which the Kings went up 3 to 1, lost the next two games, went on the road to Chicago for game seven, and topped it off by winning in overtime.

This set the stage for the finals that went only five games. The Kings won as expected. As the sports cliché has it, "It was much closer than the score indicated." The series started in Los Angeles where the Kings won the first two games, the first in overtime and the second in double overtime. Game three in New York was a tight game despite a 3-0 Kings win. So it looked like it might be over, but instead the Rangers won game four 2-1 and the series returned to Los Angeles. Again it was double overtime

before the Kings were able to prevail and skate the Stanley Cup around the Staples Center.

One number stands out in Game Four as Ranger Goalie Henrik Lundqvist made 48 saves, to 28 for Jonathon Quick of the Kings. The Ranger's improbable run to and through the finals was about Lundqvist's goaltending as much as anything else. This is not to say that the other Ranger players were not major contributors, it is only to acknowledge that there is a good reason that Lundqvist is known as the "Great Wall of Sweden."

Nor is this meant to slight the achievements of the Los Angeles Kings who won three game sevens, came back from deficits in series and in games, showing a remarkable resilience. Nor is this meant to slight Jonathon Quick's achievements in goal. Quick is in fact a close second to Lundqvist in the ranks of NHL goalies.

There may never have been a more exciting, or a more competitive five game Stanley Cup Final than this one.

This brings us to the other five game series, the NBA Finals between the Miami Heat and the San Antonio Spurs. Certainly these were the two teams nearly everyone expected to see in the Finals, unless perhaps you were from Oklahoma City. The Heat was clearly the best team in the East and the Spurs were on a mission. The Heat had LeBron James leading the Big Three, and the Spurs had Greg Popovich brilliantly coaching Old Man River Walk, Tim Duncan, and his trio.

I don't know if there was anyone who predicted a five game series, unless they were picking the Miami Heat to win. The first two games went about as expected except for the Heat and Humidity in the un-air-conditioned San Antonio arena. The next three games were nothing short of shocking. In all three the Spurs, who were not as old as they seemed, ran the Miami Heat, who were in fact older than the Spurs, off their feet. This was as dazzling a display of basketball as has been seen in a few decades. Passes, cuts, defense, and serial open shooting from all distances, were the bane of Miami.

People kept saying that the Spurs exposed the weaknesses of the Heat. Perhaps so, but I would say rather the Spurs displayed their strengths, their talent, and their

professionalism. These in turn showcased the coaching ability of Greg Popovich who must now be mentioned with the NBA legends.

For a five game series this NBA Finals was as exciting and breathtaking as one could expect and in what it offered to basketball fans across the globe.

As for the U.S. Open only deeply dedicated golf fans could appreciate the event. For the casual television fans there was nothing to see on the weekend as no one seriously challenged Martin Kaymer who led wire to wire. It was excellent golf and it should have been appreciated by all, but unfortunately for NBC there were just too many other major sports events taking place on this weekend on which the World Cup got underway.

As it begins the excitement being generated across the globe is impressive, and the excitement generated by the US win over Ghana is a bit of a surprise. Perhaps, just perhaps, football is about to take hold among a significant number of U.S. fans, although that remains to be seen.

Two other matches got my attention in the first couple of days. The demolition of Spain by The Netherlands approached shock level. The Netherlands may be the sleeper in this World Cup although the home team still must be considered the favorite, despite their lackluster play in their first two matches. Germany too delivered a bit of a shock, not because they defeated Portugal, but because they dominated the side led by Ronaldo, the player some consider the best in the world.

I must say that I am a bit annoyed by the television people who keep telling their audiences that the World Cup is using the most modern technology with the electronic goal line judge. Welcome to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This is the same sport that refuses to use an electronic timing system controlled from the field so that when the half or game is about to end players and fans know exactly when it will end. There is no excuse to have fans and players trying to guess and leaving it to referees to decide when the game will end. This opens each match to manipulation, and that is really never a good thing, unless you are a gambler trying to protect your interests.

So the World Cup is on and in North America the sports calendar is clear. The next three weeks will no doubt produce many great matches, wonderful play, and a few surprises, and the world will be enthralled by the action.

Finally let it be noted that last night was the finale of "Fargo."

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.