

8-4-2014

Re-entry and Disorientation

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Re-entry and Disorientation" (2014). *On Sport and Society*. 55.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/55>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
August 4, 2014

I have been out of the country for less than three weeks and it is mid-summer when not much happens of note. The first thing I confronted on returning was a total reorganization of the local supermarket. Under the influence of jet lag I found this quite disorienting. As it turned out, this was only one of many changes that faced me.

I should not have been surprised by this as clearly change was in the air. Indeed while still in the air last Thursday about eighteen hours into a twenty-three hour travel day I came across an ESPN Baseball Tonight Special covering the trading deadline. It was the last hour before the 4 p.m. closing time for inter-league trades. I thought that as I passed through part of Boston's Logan Airport I had seen the improbable story that the Red Sox and A's had swapped John Lester and Yoenis Cespedes. Clearly I had misread the distant television graphics. As it turned out, I had not.

So as the clock rolled on towards 4 p.m. the trade news kept accumulating faster than my numbed brain could process it. Then just before the end of the ESPN Special a report came in that David Price was headed to Detroit in a three team deal the details of which were not yet clear. Could that really have happened? Yes, indeed, it did.

So Detroit and Oakland had strengthened their starting pitching, with Detroit doing it without any obvious damage to their offense. In the other league St. Louis was adding on as well gathering two starting pitchers in John Lackey and Justin Masterson. It was clear that the Red Sox had blown up their team with a flurry of activity that could only be admired in the Miami Marlin front office.

So in a matter of a few hours the baseball pennant races took on a totally new look. While the Red Sox had declared themselves dead, the Tigers, A's, and Cardinals were ready to go all out for a World Series championship. How all this finally works itself out will make for a very entertaining August and September for baseball fans. Meanwhile I fastened my seat belt, put my tray table into an upright and locked position, and checked to see that my seat back was where it should be.

Getting back on the ground and catching up on my sports news I read about Stephen A. Smith's sociological treatise on women and violence. I didn't realize that Smith was an expert in this area too, but there it was. The reaction to Smith's comments was quite intense as he was denounced all across the electronic world we now inhabit. Only ESPN seemed to be able to take Smith's comments in stride, suspending him for a week from all the ESPN platforms.

Then I caught up on the Ray Rice case. Roger Goodell trying his best to be a great leader of a great brand, while "Protecting the Shield" at minimal cost to all concerned, said that the two game suspension of Rice for his admitted domestic violence was consistent with other punishments given by the league. That was certainly a dangerous statement as over the years there have been many different suspensions of varied length for many different issues and consistency was not a hallmark of these decisions.

Then there are those who insisted that Rice owed the world a full explanation for what happened that infamous night in the elevator between Ray Rice and the woman who is now his wife. She was apparently able to forgive, whereas many others who are less intimate with Rice are not so forgiving. Whatever the case may be the only one who is owed an accounting of the details of any of this is Mrs. Rice and what went on between the two of them is no one's business but theirs.

On the college scene there is increased attention being given to the rape issue and its handling on campus, both in terms of athletes and non-athletes. This is one of the most shameful issues in higher education which for too long has been hidden by college administrators and athletic departments. One of the most chilling reports on this can be found in the July 13 issue of the *New York Times*. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/13/us/how-one-college-handled-a-sexual-assault-complaint.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Ar%2C{%221%22%3A%22RI%3A5%22}>)

Also on the college scene there was a settlement of the head injury law suit with the NCAA agreeing to create a \$70M fund to diagnose thousands of players in contact sports for brain trauma. It covers current and former players as far back as five decades.

This is certainly a step that was needed, but unless it is followed by another fund for treatment it remains not much more than a gesture to settle a case that the NCAA knew it was going to lose. Potentially more significant is the agreement to create a uniform code for return to play for those suffering head injuries.

This is but the end of the beginning for the NCAA and for other sport organizations dealing with this issue.

While enjoying the weekend parade of sport I was jolted once again when I saw a promo for an NFL exhibition game that was being play on Sunday. It couldn't be. It was August. Say it isn't so Roger!

And finally on the lighter side, in case you missed it, I can report that two major sporting events were held this weekend in Germany. The 2014 World Championship of Handbag Tossing took place August 2 in Movie Park. Four disciplines were contested: Over-arm throwing, long distance tossing, freestyle, and discuss. Judges consider both technical proficiency and choreography by the teams of four. The BBC reported that this year the Golden Handbag was taken by the team from Australia.

Of perhaps lesser import was the Spicy Food Eating Championships in Berlin on the same day. Contestants ate their way through fourteen specially prepared dishes of increasing heat. For the record Stephen Kuehne of Macedonia was the winner offering the observation that it isn't the heat in the mouth that is so bad, it is the stomach cramps that follow.

Exactly the way I felt when I heard that the NFL was playing football on August 3.

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.

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