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Tyson Holyfield, Cathedrals, Skewed Values

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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It was Monday the 30th of June. I had just spent the morning at the Vatican Museum, the final stop of which is at the Sistine Chapel, considered by some to be the penultimate work of art in the history of the western world. To stand in that large room and absorb the work of Michelangelo, even among the crush and din of the tourists, is one of the great experiences of a lifetime. You leave with a feeling that there is indeed something of the divine within the human spirit which Michelangelo has managed to capture on the walls and ceilings.

Leaving the Vatican museum and passing through the streets back to the subway I spotted a newsstand, and stopped to see if the Herald-Tribune was available. I knew that the results of the Tyson-Holyfield fight would be in the Monday edition.

Indeed they were. On the front page was the headline announcing the disqualification of Tyson for biting the ear of Holyfield. Certainly the headline was a mistake, a misprint of some sort. On the subway I read through the story of this less than sublime act in the history of western sport. The more I read, the more I could not believe my eyes. Tyson not only bit his opponent once, but twice, and in fact bit off a piece of Holyfield's ear.

From the sublime to the ridiculous in a matter of minutes. From the Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo to the Van Gogh-like event in Las Vegas. The juxtaposition of occurrences was almost too much for me to process. Somehow I felt I had just experienced some measure of the progress of man over several centuries, a measure not conveyed by an upward sloping line.

It was a feeling that I had several times over the next two weeks, as I saw the cathedrals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and thought of how these compare to the cathedrals of modern America. These great churches representing, as Henry Adams has written, the power of the Virgin, offer an interesting comparison with the stadia of modern America, created by the power of sport to rally the masses and lead them to offer public treasure for a franchise. Even the stadia of the Romans which dot the landscape from Rome to France offer an interesting reminder of the power of sport to generate monuments, and these too offer a stark comparison to the great cathedrals of Europe.

If sport is the new religion of the 20th century, surely it is one of considerably less power than the religion of the 12th,

13th and 14th centuries. Nor will Jacobs Field, the Ballpark at Arlington, or even Yankee Stadium endure as long as the Coliseum in Rome or the Arena at Arles in southern France.

Perhaps Mike Tyson was able to capture something of the essence of modern sport with his ludicrous and empty sporting gesture in Las Vegas, the Mecca of tainted sport, the Rome of modern sport, the seat of gambling and avarice which remain at the heart of contemporary sport.

Returning home the story did not improve. Hardly off the plane I was greeted by the details of the Dennis Scott incident. In the world of modern sport nearly all values, or the measure of all value, have become monetary. Poor Dennis will make only \$3M next year, a sure sign that he is not adequately appreciated. The mind boggles at the distortion of perception that can lead one to complain that \$3M is not enough to play professional basketball at a less than adequate level.

Poor Dennis is not appreciated for his skills, is not loved, is not getting enough playing time, is not getting enough money. At one level of course you can appreciate his concern. In a world of distorted numbers, his numbers seem less than adequate, at least to himself and his agent.

Then a few days later we hear that Phil Jackson's agent is "insulted" by the numbers the Bulls are offering his client. It seems Phil "deserves" some \$5M to \$7M to coach the Bulls, who apparently are not offering that much. But to be insulted in that stratospheric financial layer is again hard to comprehend except relatively.

Indeed I too feel insulted by the numbers that the state legislature has thrown at me. Legislators have shown no respect for me as a person. They are trying to take away my dignity. Maybe I'll sit out a year. Dennis, Phil and I, grossly underappreciated.

Perhaps we should all stand in the middle of the Sistine Chapel and shout such nonsense there. Would it seem that all we are really asking, in the spirit of Charlie Brown, is our fair share? Or would we all finally be able to grasp the true measure of man in such a sublime setting?

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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