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U.S. Figure Skating Championship in Orlando - UCF Basketball- NFL Playoffs

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Last weekend was one of those wonderful sports weekends when quality, quantity and variety were available to the sportsfan in Orlando. Within less than three days I had the good fortune to see the 1992 U.S. Figure Skating Championships, an excellent and competitive college basketball game on the UCF campus, and the NFL conference championships on television. It was a reminder to me that for all the nonsense and crassness on the contemporary sport scene, sport itself still is the thing.

Throughout all of last week the United States figure skating championships graced the Orlando Arena. For those who wonder what ice skating is doing in Florida, take notice. The attendance at this championship week in Orlando was the largest in the history of the event. There is in fact a small but active skating community in Orlando, and there are two quality rinks available. But of course that alone would not be enough to produce attendance in excess of 130,000 for the week.

I had the good fortune to go to the Arena last Friday and Saturday to see both phases of the women's competition, and the finals of the ice dancing competition. Clearly the highlight of both evenings was the skating of Kristy Yamagucci, who on both nights skated near flawless programs. In addition Tonya Harding trying to compete on a sore ankle illustrated the fragility of success, and an extremely strong will.

There is a beauty and power to figure skating that is difficult to describe and overwhelming to witness. The demand for the mastery of motor skills and for extraordinary strength, when combined with grace and artistry, as with all great art puts the highest human possibilities on display. With her skating, grace, artistic interpretation, and obvious joy in the performance, Kristy Yamagucci, took the crowd in the Arena and the television audience around the nation to the heights of the sporting experience.

On Saturday afternoon I had a completely different, but nearly as enjoyable sporting experience at the new Arena on the UCF campus. There was a time at the University of Central Florida when you could go to a basketball game and see and feel the best qualities of intercollegiate sport. That has not been the case over the past decade, but those days are back, and it is to the credit of Joe Dean that they are.

The Running Knights are an extremely entertaining aggregation of young men who deserve to be seen by every sports fan in Central Florida. Joe Dean's group of young recruits, largely freshman and sophomores anchored by the senior center Ken Leeks, are playing basketball with high energy, great hustle, and like it's fun. And they are consequently fun to watch. Intensity is everywhere, and Saturday when they took on Jacksonville University it looked like the beginning of a great rivalry. For those who remember back a decade, it had the feel of one of those memorable Florida Southern games.

It my view great coaches especially at the college level are great teachers, and at any level great coaches teach defense. If you go out to the UCF Arena you will see a great teacher at work on the sidelines, and you will see a team that takes pride in its defense.

This team will not win the conference championship, and it did not even win the game on Saturday. There is still too much inexperience on the floor at this point, and Saturday they got beat by freshman mistakes. But I left the Arena knowing that I had seen a great college basketball game, I had seen one more example of the beauty of sport. I also left knowing that the future of UCF basketball is in good hands.

On Sunday afternoon it was on to football. The NFL Conference championships filled the television screen for nearly seven hours, and for the first time this season I watched an entire professional football game.

The first one, Denver at Buffalo for the AFC championship, looked to be a game that would be dominated by the two big name and high priced quarterbacks, John Elway and Jim Kelly. It was not. It was dominated by defense. Buffalo was totally stymied by Denver's defense, and Kelly was ineffective. The high scoring run and shoot offense, couldn't run and couldn't pull the trigger. On the other side the Buffalo defense played with fierce intensity and Cornelius Bennett looked like a man possessed for the second week in a row. It was a great struggle, won in the end by virtue of an offensive mistake by John Elway, and marked by the play of two great defenses.

In Washington it was defense again. The Redskin defense came out and raised complete havoc with Detroit's offense, and within five minutes had given Washington a ten point lead. It was simply no place for a rookie quarterback, as Eric Kramer was thrown into total confusion by the Redskins defensive scheme. On

the other side, the Redskins offense was able to capitalize on Detroit mistakes, and get a few big plays of its own. The result was a blowout, but an interesting blowout.

Both games illustrated the importance of defense, and both games were played with an intensity that is seldom seen during the NFL regular season. Great athletes going all out for over three hours produced some excellent football, and illustrated once again that what makes sport great is not winning or losing, but the striving for excellence.

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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