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Too Much Sport on Television?

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE

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We've all heard the conventional wisdom that if you eat too much chocolate it will make you sick. Some of us experienced this phenomenon as children and learned from it.

Growing up in a world where major league baseball came mostly by radio, fading in and out through the night air, it seemed unlikely that a time would come when sports on television could produce a feeling akin to the nausea of gorging on too much chocolate.

In truth, too much chocolate and too much sport, have always seemed to me to be oxymoronic concepts. Now, I fear, only chocolate remains in this category.

As we begin the season of the NBA and NHL playoffs, which run headlong into the first month of the baseball season, strange thoughts and feelings are spinning in my head. Day after day, night after night, the games roll across the big screen in living color.

On any given night this week I could watch four NBA playoff games with starting times staggered across the continent and the face of the clock. From just after dinner until way past the witching hour players were taking it to the hoop, shooting from three point land, and playing illegal defenses.

Simultaneously there was another set of teams skating up and down the ice of ESPN and ESPN2. Again across the night and across the continent our favorites were trying to hold home ice, avoid being humiliated in their own building, or riding a hot goalie. There were two or three games available each evening, and I actually got to see my beloved Edmonton Oilers twice.

Scattered across other channels were the Cubs impersonating some other team, the Braves dodging snow flakes in Denver, and the Devil Rays having a great start for a new franchise in an new, yet old, lopsided domed stadium. There was Sunday Night Baseball and the Wednesday Night Doubleheader, Thursday Nights on Fox, multiple versions of This Week In Baseball filling in all those rain and snow delays, and all of this while Mark McGuire was crumbling under the pressure of chasing Roger Maris.

And me, I've got papers to grade, books to read, and final exams piling up on my desk.

But wait there's more. Tennis matches from parts of the globe I have never seen, golf tournaments of old players I know and young players I don't, except for Tiger Woods. Fortunately Woods doesn't play in all these tournaments or I would be need another TV just to track the Tiger.

Let's just focus on the playoffs, the second season. Isn't it great to be able to see all these games? Isn't it great to be able to follow the ups and downs of your favorite teams? Isn't this better than having to turn the dial of a radio with the delicate touch of a safe cracker, desperately seeking some game, any game?

Well it should be. But I keep thinking about all that chocolate and I'm beginning to wonder if nausea might set in.

I must confess that with all these games available I find it nearly impossible to sit down and watch a full game, end to end, start to finish, even if it is my team. There are just too many options, too many choices. As soon as one game is no longer close, I go searching for another. At every timeout I'm off to check on the other games. The danger here is that you catch some team in a "run" or with a two-man advantage, and you can't move on, nor move back. Insiders call it "clicker sticker."

Soon you lose track of the game you are watching. You are now watching all of them, and yet none of them. You cry out for cross-checking on Alonzo Mourning, or for the Flyers to be called for an illegal defense. The one lucky break is that this year there are very few double-dipping playoff cities, otherwise you might not be able to distinguish between the Flyers and the Sixers, the Bulls and Blackhawks, the Heat or the Humidity.

The early rounds of the playoffs have become like the first-half of an NBA game. They are there, but do we care? Should we care? If any single game is not interesting, find another. If one game is in the second quarter and another in the fourth with the score close, which game will you watch?

Maybe it's just too much. Maybe we need government regulation. Maybe the rationing of games is the answer.

If only I could remember the question.

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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