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Goodell and Drones

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - GOODELL AND DRONES
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For the past few years the NFL, through the pious pronouncements from its Commissioner, Roger Goodell, has professed a heavy commitment to safety, with a particular focus on hits to the head. This of course followed years of cover-up and denial of any connection between CTE and football related head trauma, not to mention an active and aggressive campaign against anyone and any evidence to the contrary.

Last week the NFL season got underway with a much hyped national telecast of the Denver Broncos and Carolina Panther game, a rematch of last season's Super Bowl. If you watched the game, saw the highlights, or read game accounts you know that one of the major features of the game was helmet-to-helmet hits by Denver on the head of Panther quarterback Cam Newton. The Panthers put the number of blows to Newton's head at four.

The number of penalties for these hits was one, and it was nullified by an intentional grounding call on Newton because his pass did not go beyond the line of scrimmage. No one has asked NFL officials how far the average quarterback can throw a ball while having his head smashed.

Adding to the festivities was the fact that apparently the much touted "concussion protocols" initiated as a safety measure were not activated following the hits on Newton. Much was made of the "concussion protocols" as evidence that the NFL really does care about the health (both short term and long term) of its players. These protocols have been accepted by owners and by the Players Association (NFLPA), and have been tightened each season since 2013. Unfortunately to be effective they have to be used.

The press has been hammering away over the pounding that Newton took without penalties being called. Newton's father questioned the lack of penalties. The Panther players and coaches have criticized the league and the officials. Some have wondered if the referees would have allowed Tom Brady to be subjected to this sort of head bashing.

This meant it was time for action of the PR variety. It was time for Goodell to step forward and renew his commitment to the safety of the players. He did so on Wednesday by announcing a new initiative in which the NFL will spend \$100M on the development of new technology and further research on the effects of head injuries. He is now surely the King of Chutzpah.

One of the standard examples of Chutzpah concerns the boy who killed his parents and then appeared in the court pleading for mercy on the grounds he was now an orphan. Goodell's latest public pronouncement of commitment to player safety coming in the wake of heavy public criticism of the league, places Goodell in the company of that orphan.

After the Denver and Carolina game one Denver player received a fine for his helmet-hit on Newton. Then yesterday in a further escalation of this public relations exercise, a second Denver player was fined. As to the "concussion protocols" there is no evidence that they were invoked following any of the hits to Newton's head. As yet, no fines have been handed out over that minor oversight.

Turning to another less serious issue, ESPN: The Worldwide Leader in Sports, has announced that it will be enriching the lives of sports fans by televising Drone Racing. I will admit that I did not know such a thing existed or that it was a sport,

but now that it will appear on the network of the Worldwide Leader, by definition, it does exist and is a sport.

In point of fact it is worldwide and there are leagues and national championships. There are also classes and divisions consisting of various types of drones. Next month the World Championship of Drone Racing will take place at Kualoa Ranch in Hawaii. Not only will ESPN televise the event, but several of the major sports networks across the globe will air the "action," if that is the proper word. I am sorry to report that you have missed the U.S. Nationals held in early August on Governor's Island in New York City.

According to *The Guardian*, quadcopter flying, or rotor sports as some would have it, has attracted "wealthy benefactors, million-dollar TV deals, and famous investors." This year's Dubai World Drone Prix held in March handed out \$1M in prize money to the top competitors. And if further validation is needed, Sky Sports will be offering ten episodes of racing from the Drone Racing League to drone starved Europeans.

There it is then: World and National Championships, local leagues, big prize money, and television. There is a Speed/Agility completion, Free Style, and Team competition. Without question, Drone Racing is a sport. Those who doubt that things like horse racing, auto racing, or boat racing are sports will probably have their doubts about Drone Racing. I will reserve judgement on the question until it is clear what elements of skill are involved in the competition, or if winners are simply a function of who possesses the best technology.

So what's next? My guess is that it will be tied to technology, probably smart phones, and will involve competing against other humans who have smart phones. Oh, sorry, that's here already.

I don't think that Pokémon has much television appeal yet, nor is there a World Championship. Or is there? Believe it or not there is. The 2016 World Championships were held in San Francisco in late August. Competitors from thirty-five countries participated.

So it too must be a sport. Attention ESPN!

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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