

Fernandez and Palmer

9-29-2016

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Fernandez and Palmer" (2016). *On Sport and Society*. 629.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/629>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lee.dotson@ucf.edu.

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
September 29, 2016

There is crying in baseball and in Miami this past week there was a flood of tears. The shocking news that Jose Fernandez had been killed in a boating accident produced disbelief and sadness. For his family, for teammates, for Marlin fans, and for baseball fans across the country, it was a jolting piece of news that greeted them on Sunday morning. The following day came the announcement of the death of Arnold Palmer, the man who is credited with making golf a favorite sport for ordinary fans in the new television age. The juxtaposition of the two deaths has a kind of symmetry to it, with two stars, one at the beginning another at the end of their careers leaving Sportsworld at nearly the same time.

Time is often difficult to fully comprehend and the brevity and longevity of these two careers laid side-by-side challenge our notions of time. One career went on for decades; the other for only a few years. Yet both men had a major impact on their sport through the power of their achievements and personalities.

Over the past few years while living in Florida, I have had many opportunities to watch Jose Fernandez pitch on the Marlins television network. He was gifted with what is sometimes termed an "electric" arm. Jose's fastball was in the mid-90s and had considerable movement. That combination produced a high strikeout total and a low earned run average. His impact on Miami and the Marlins was immediate.

His brief life was remarkable. Two failed attempts to escape Cuba and a third that was successful offered considerable drama, especially adding the fact that the third attempt was punctuated by the saving of a passenger who had fallen overboard. That passenger rescued by Jose turned out to be his mother.

Fernandez went to high school in Tampa, where he was a star pitcher and was drafted by the Marlins with their first pick in the 2011 June draft. He moved quickly through the Marlins system to the major leagues arriving in 2013. Jose was an instant star and celebrity enhanced by his special connection to the Cuban-American community in the city. For a franchise that has been floundering for several seasons, he brought with him the promise of a brighter future, indeed a brighter present. He was an all-star that season and National League Rookie of the Year. Two seasons were shortened by Tommy John surgery and its aftermath.

This season he was back in superb form and again selected to the National League All-Star team.

All of these things were part of his impressive resume, but for me what set him apart from others was his enthusiasm for the game and the visible joy with which he played. There are other players who play with joy and for whom the game is fun. Jose Fernandez played with as much joy and enthusiasm as anyone I have ever watched. His pitching was intense, but his smile said it was also great fun.

I saw him pitch in person just once and that was in Miami in late August of his rookie season. He had an excellent outing against the Colorado Rockies and one of the highlights was in the first inning of the game. Troy Tulowitzki hit a line drive back through the middle. Fernandez made a lightning quick reaction with his glove and headed off the sure base hit. Tulowitzki stopped in his tracks a few feet from the plate in disbelief. Fernandez returned the look with a big, almost sheepish, smile. Tulowitzki just shook his head.

On nights when he was not pitching, Jose was a fixture on the dugout steps, always highly animated and cheering for his team. He was a fan as well as a player. When he came out of a game he remained in the dugout until the game ended. His post-game interviews were always a treat because he conveyed so much enthusiasm and usually had something of substance to say.

One of the most memorable moments came when he was reunited with his grandmother, his greatest fan and mentor. She was in Cuba and Jose often said that the one thing he wanted more than anything was to have her see him pitch in the big leagues. The Marlins somehow got her out of Cuba and brought her to the Marlins media room where Jose was told he was to do an interview. She was brought into the room, and it was a powerful emotional moment. From that point on his mother and grandmother became fixtures behind the Marlins dugout each time Jose pitched.

There were many strands to Jose's brief life and baseball career. His story is full and his impact will last for many years in Miami and in the Marlins baseball community.

When I heard the news Sunday morning I was reminded of the night in March of 1993 when another boating accident took the lives of Cleveland Indian pitchers Steve Olin and Tim Crews. There was one survivor, Bobby Ojeda, who eventually returned to baseball.

After Saturday's accident Jose and his two friends will not return, and his Marlin teammates are left behind to carry on. It will not be easy, as we have already seen.

Arnold Palmer's death was announced the next day. Palmer has been here in Orlando for several decades. His impact on the community included many charitable activities. Support for cancer research and the Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital are among the most significant. In golf there is the Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill every March.

His golfing career spanned several decades as player, teacher, and course designer. In the age of television, golf came to the fore largely because of the drawing power of Arnold Palmer. His career delineates the golden years of golf, The Age of Arnold Palmer, when golf came out of the exclusive atmosphere of the country club and into popular view via television. In 1956, the television networks carried approximately five and a half hours of golf. By 1970, that amount of coverage could be seen on an average weekend. Prize money and the number of players on tour shot up, and the Associated Press named Arnold Palmer, "Athlete of the Decade."

What Arnold Palmer brought to golf was the common man, his golfing charisma and skills, and high drama. Although Palmer was in the national focus with his win at the Master's in 1954, his national stature as golfing hero came at the U.S. Open in Denver in 1960, when what became known as "Arnie's Charge" was first seen on the national television stage. Entering the final round Palmer was 15th on the leader board and seven strokes behind. He carded a 65 on the birdie-filled final round to win the tournament. The come-from-behind win became his golfing signature, and in a short time he attracted, especially on the final day of any tournament, what became known as "Arnie's Army."

With Palmer at the top of his game what was needed was a rival and Jack Nicklaus provided one. In the mid-60s Jack arrived at the top of the game, challenging Palmer and eventually surpassing him in victories, although never in popularity. The competition was good for the game of golf, and the rivalry offered excellent reality television.

Arnold Palmer was an advertising man's dream, and his endorsements bought him income well beyond his golf earnings. He had such drawing power that he attracted endorsement contracts

for products well beyond any connections with golf. In the late 1980s, he was still pulling in \$8M in endorsement fees.

Palmer also invested wisely with the guidance of a man who handled his endorsements and his personal appearances. Mark McCormack was a Cleveland lawyer who became the financial advisor and sport business agent for Palmer. His success working with Palmer led other golfers to seek his advice and services, and soon his reputation spread beyond the world of golf. What McCormack began with Arnold Palmer grew in multiple directions. The result was the creation of the International Management Group (IMG), the largest and most powerful sports marketing operation in the world, and indeed the single most dominant power in the world of sport, no longer confined to marketing but encompassing event production and management, player agents, television production, and all things associated with sport and beyond.

In some ways, IMG is a child of Arnold Palmer's success and is another way in which Arnold Palmer transformed not only golf but the entire world of modern commercial sport. The significance of Arnold Palmer's career goes well beyond what most think of as the Palmer legacy, and one suspects that Palmer himself may not have fully understood or appreciated the vast influence that he had on sport.

So here we are sitting at the end of an era; at the end of one long and significant career, and one short, powerful and significant career. It is worth reflecting on both and their meaning for us in our frenetic world.

When something like this happens I am always drawn back to A.E. Housman's *To An Athlete Dying Young*. With these two deaths coming so close together the fifth stanza of the poem seems to speak to both:

*Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man*

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.

Copyright 2016 by Richard C. Crepeau