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The summer in sports

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
The summer in sports
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It is my position that Rafael Palmeiro became the King of Performance Enhancement Drugs when he first appeared in a Viagra commercial. Nothing has happened in the past few days to change that view.

Writing this column for the first time since wandering through the American heartland for six weeks, I am struck by how many different amazing, wonderful, and silly things have happened in the world of sport in so short a time. The Palmeiro "shock" may be the least important of these.

Of much more significance is the achievement by Lance Armstrong who for the seventh straight year won the Tour de France. This is one of the great athletic achievements of all time and one that some American sports fans have denigrated and devalued. To contemplate Armstrong is to contemplate the triumph of the human spirit. His personal story is well known and there is no need to recount it here.

What should be recounted is the unprecedented achievement in an event that requires the utmost from mind and body. Think of how many times Armstrong did what he did. Then think about how, in many of these years, including this one, Armstrong's victory seemed to come almost without challenge. But, of course, there was challenge from the other great riders, from the demands of the course, and from the ravages of time. Great athletes always make it look easy, but it seldom is.

Armstrong defied all these forces. As an athletic achievement, it is difficult to think of any other that matches this one, even though there are. This is clearly one of the great moments in sport history and we should celebrate it along with our luck in having witnessed it.

Tiger Woods too offered great memories along with sterling golf capturing his win in The Open at St. Andrews. Once again Woods displayed superb skills and nerves of steel fending off each challenger in turn. The final margin of five strokes over Colin Montgomery scarcely hints at his tale of great golf under great pressure. Tiger has now won his tenth major and second Open. This is another of those ongoing stories in sport that has

delivered great play and great competition and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

This is the second time that Woods has won the Open in the year that Jack Nicklaus was retiring and both times at St. Andrews. Time moves rapidly in the world of sport. Woods and Nicklaus now are the only two golfers in history to have won all four majors twice. Woods has now won ten majors as he creeps closer to Nicklaus' eighteen majors. We are also lucky to be witnessing these achievements.

Wimbledon rolled past for its annual fortnight and I am sorry to say that I saw very little of this tennis treasure. Perhaps, this is compensation for the fact that I walked the sacred ground of the All England Club just a year ago.

Another development of great significance, although many will doubt it, is the end of the lockout in the National Hockey League. In the long run this may turn out to be the most significant event of this past year. It may also turn out to be the canary in the mineshaft of sport.

Quite simply the players were crushed.

Salaries are being rolled back as much as 24% and a new revenue sharing system has been accepted, placing a cap on salaries. The damage done by the lockout, including the loss of the American television contract and the ire of the public, leaves the future of the NHL in doubt. Recovery, if it comes, will be slow even if the crowds return to the arenas. Weak franchises may never recover.

For those who have wondered how long salaries can continue to rise in professional sport, there may finally be an answer forthcoming from hockey. How long it will be before the ceiling is hit in the other sports remains to be seen. That it will, seems inevitable.

Another little gem that caught my eye was the announcement by San Diego State University that it, along with other university athletic departments, are instituting policies to allow their fans to participate in the hiring of coaches and administrators. One could argue that there is a certain logic here, in that fans are often instrumental in the firing of coaches.

An NCAA official in another telling choice of words describes this development as "bringing them in to make them

shareholders." To me it is simply madness, and one more piece of evidence that the intercollegiate athletic enterprise has nothing to do with the educational mission of the university.

Closer to home in Orlando, I have returned to find that the Orlando Magic spent their number one pick in the NBA draft on some guy from Spain whom no one ever heard of, and now may never be seen in Orlando. As if to underline their management incompetence, the Magic have offered their fans one more reason to keep the sign in front of the O-rena that has been there since Shaq started them on the magical ride down the road to disaster. That sign still reads, "Tonight: Plenty of Good Seats Still Available."

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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