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Catching Up Part I

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - CATCHING UP PART I
JULY 19, 2021

In this time of disruption in our lives and in the sports calendar, there are annoyances, irritations, and the occasional gift. The past few months were loaded with top-level sporting events, with some surprising developments, and with more than the usual quota of madness. So fasten your seat belt for an overlong and overblown two editions of Sport and Society.

Just in the past two weeks two of the major sports in North America, the NBA and the NHL, have conducted their season ending playoffs. In hockey, the Tampa Bay Lightning repeated as Stanley Cup Champions in an entertaining playoff season of great hockey. The only downside was the fact too many games turned into street fights. It started with the first-round brawl between Boston and Washington that was unfortunately reminiscent of the Philadelphia Flyers of the 70s. They were known as the Broad Street Bullies for a reason.

The NBA finals, which will end this week, were also a bit of a surprise as the Los Angeles Lakers were not participants. As an alternative, we have been treated to some very good basketball in a variety of styles, especially as played by the Milwaukee Bucks and the Phoenix Suns. Although not overall great basketball, the NBA finals produced some great performances by any number of very good players. It seems that the best of them is Giannis Antetokounmpo, who some are calling the greatest big man to ever play the game.

The one flaw in this playoff was the fact that so many star players missed all or part of several series with what are now termed "soft tissue injuries." There is considerable speculation as to the cause of this rash of injuries, including too many games in too compressed a calendar. The only thing for certain is that NBA injuries were not caused by thugs with sticks looking to break bones.

Both leagues also provided examples of the international character of major elite sport, as players from all corners of the globe populated both hockey and basketball rosters with many achieving star status.

As these playoffs ran their course, there were two major golf championships and two major tennis championships on display. In golf, the U.S. Open ended with the championship decided on the

final hole as John Rahm bested Louis Oosthuizen after a tense final day of play. At The Open, just concluded Sunday, Oosthuizen was back on stage after leading each of the first three days of play. On the final day, Oosthuizen stumbled and Collin Morikowa, playing The Open for the first time, caught and passed Oosthuizen and fended off a threat by Jordan Spieth who could not sustain his moments of brilliant play.

If golf is not your game, then how about some tennis where two major championships were contested. At the French Open and then Wimbledon, the women's game seemed to be playing out a changing of the guard at the top. Serena Williams withdrew from both events, and it appears that her quest to become the all-time leader in Grand Slam championships will not happen.

Unfortunately, the two tournaments were without one of the great young players, Naomi Osaka, as she withdrew from both the French Open and Wimbledon over mandatory post-match interviews. Tennis authorities showed little sympathy for Osaka's mental and/or emotional state with the French officials leading the way with disciplinary threats if she refused post-match interviews.

On the men's side, Novak Djokovic won both the French Open and Wimbledon, and following his early season win in Australia, he is now in a position to win the Grand Slam of tennis at The U.S. Open. Now called the calendar slam, the Grand Slam has not been achieved since 1969 when Rod Laval did it, repeating his 1962 Grand Slam. Three women have achieved the Grand Slam of tennis: Maureen Connolly in 1953; Margaret Court in 1970; and Steffi Graf in 1988. Djokovic now has matched Nadal and Federer in Grand Slam wins at 20, and he is positioned to pass them with a win in the U.S. Open which would complete the Grand Slam.

If neither golf nor tennis is of interest, or simply not enough, the past weekend marked the end of the Tour de France, the grueling 23-day race that is loved by millions across the globe. On Sunday at about the same time as The Open ended, Tadej Pogacar from Slovenia collected his second Tour victory in Paris.

The previous Sunday, EURO 2020 ended a year late with Italy winning over England. When England won its semi-final game there were several days of celebration among English fans. These fans of the Three Lions seemed to be warming up for their first international win in decades. In the end, the celebration took place in Italy as the English watched their hopes dashed in a shootout.

English fans had to settle for an exhibition of racist tweets attacking the Black players who missed their shots in the shootout. In fairness, it should be added that there was a massive condemnation of the attacks by fans across England and across the world. Boris Johnson and other politicians joined in the condemnation of the tweets and harassment, which they themselves had helped to lay the groundwork for with dog whistle attacks on the England players who took a knee before the EURO 2020 matches.

To be continued...

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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