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A Great Month Plus

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - A GREAT MONTH PLUS
NOVEMBER 9, 2021

The month of October for sports fans in the United States presents a feast of events that makes October the best of all possible months. With baseball's regular season at an end the playoffs and World Series carry the baseball fan through the early fall.

Simultaneously, football, both college and NFL, are in full swing in October. By the end of the month, the mid-point of the season has been reached. In early October, baseball and football are joined by hockey; again, both college and professional leagues begin. Then, as the month wanes, the NBA joins the crowd to produce sports overload.

There is an old joke about a primary school teacher who asks the students if they know what the four seasons are? One student shoots a hand into the air, shouting, "I know, I know. The four seasons are baseball, football, basketball and hockey." Clearly that joke is no longer operative. The sports seasons run into one another, overlapping and competing for attention, and some would argue that sports are no longer seasonal at all, but have become year-long and unending.

The highpoint of October is the baseball playoff and World Series. This year, there were the usual number of great plays by great players, and as often happens, ordinary players do the extraordinary and become stars, if only shooting stars of the moment. There are surprise teams, some winning and some losing, who get on a hot streak and move unexpectedly to the top.

The team that made the playoffs with the lowest winning percentage for the regular season of all playoff teams was the Atlanta Braves. They then went on to defeat the team with 105 wins in the regular season, the Los Angeles Dodgers. Then, they won the World Series against the powerhouse Houston Astros, who were appearing in the World Series for the third time in the past five seasons.

Most of the teams that were in the playoffs were playing without key players who had been injured during the season or in the Series itself. The Braves lost their best player at mid-season and their best available pitcher in the first game of the World

Series. The Astros and Dodgers were also missing pitchers and key players.

In what may be a harbinger of the future of baseball, it was relief pitchers who were the key to winning. Starting pitchers rarely went beyond four innings. In most World Series games, teams often used ten pitchers each, and this led to games of three and one-half to four hours in length.

Among the hitting stars for the Atlanta Braves were Eddie Rosario, Jorge Solar, Joc Pederson, and Adam Duvall. None were members of the team at the beginning of the season. All came to the Braves' outfield after mid-season. Although the Braves had good starting pitching, they lost some starters to injury during the season and, as noted, one more in the first game of the Series. As a result the Braves, had to rely heavily on their relievers in the post-season.

As someone who saw their first major league game in person at Milwaukee County Stadium in the 1950s, I have a strong attachment to the Braves that was reinforced by living in the Southeast since the start of the 70s. This World Series had an extra attraction with the close links between Dusty Baker, Brian Snitker, and Hank Aaron.

Although many are decrying the length of the games, the demise of the starting pitcher, the intrusion of baseball analytics, and any number of other ills, it should be remembered that the baseball Jeremiahs have been part of the game for most of its history. Something is nearly always said to be killing baseball, but in the end, baseball rolls on. Clearly no longer the national pastime, it still attracts plenty of attention and new fans, and each October, it still reigns supreme for a large number of sports fans.

Baseball remains at the top of my list of favorites, however, the first weekend in November brings The Breeders Cup, the World Series of horse racing. For two days, some of the best horses from the United States, Canada, Europe, and now Japan and Korea, come together to compete in fourteen different types of races on grass and on dirt for millions of dollars in purse money.

I know that horse racing has fallen into considerable disfavor in the past few decades, but, for me, despite the problems, it remains a sport of beauty and skill as it has been for several centuries. The horse as athlete is still a reality, no matter how much the humans have tampered with the sport. For me,

attending The Breeders Cup rivals attending the World Series and the Stanley Cup Finals.

As the horses supply beauty and athleticism, the jockeys and trainers bring their skills to the sport. The trainers prepare the horses, and the jockeys manage the horses and the race. Watching the jockeys maneuver their horses through a race, making the critical decisions of when to accelerate and which path to take is one of the fascinations with horse racing. In addition, the power of an accelerating horse down the stretch is a unique experience.

At present horse racing in the United States is in crisis and one that must be overcome in the next year. The legal use of drugs in horse racing in the United States makes racing here an outlier in the world. The illegal use of drugs, when not policed, is even a greater danger to the horses and to the future of the sport.

When judgements are made by people who have a vested interest in the outcome, it cannot be good for any sport. Bob Baffert is one of the leading trainers in racing today. In the past few years his horses have been testing positive for illegal substances at an alarming rate, thirty in a thirteen-month period. One of those was Medina Spirt that tested positive at the Kentucky Derby after finishing first. As a result, Baffert is banned from racing his horses in Kentucky.

That ban did not effect his ability to bring his horses to The Breeder's Cup in California. The decision to allow him to compete was made by the Breeder's Cup Board. According to Joe Drape of the *New York Times*, six members of the Board own horses trained by Baffert, and six others have horses under Baffert's care. All but two of the fourteen Board members have ties to Baffert.

Congress has passed a reform bill for horse racing that goes into effect in 2022. If this doesn't clean up the sport, it will be a tragedy, and could sink the sport.

One other quick note from the National Football League concerns the State Farm Diva and Green Bay Packer quarterback who tested positive for Covid-19. As a result, he was not able to play against Kansas City this past weekend. As befits a Diva, Aaron Rodgers, is claiming foul. He violated the league protocols for non-vaccinated players, and he now claims to be the one who is a victim.

Rodgers complained that the "woke mob" was coming after him and that he is a victim of "cancel culture," showing he has little understanding of either. "Cancel culture" is what happened to Colin Kapernick not Aaron Rodgers. The "woke mob" is one of those vague classifications that apparently includes the press, social media, and anyone who questions the actions of Aaron Rodgers.

Those who do their medical research on the internet may have missed the legitimate information available from medical science. Those who wish to rake in millions in the NFL, may want to follow the rules of the league. How this will play out remains to be seen, while the more pressing question is, will State Farm be offering an Immunity Rate?

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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