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A Month to Remember

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
November 8, 2015

For the past several weeks I have seen a multitude of stories from the wild world of sport that have struck me as something about which I wanted to write and set my brain whirring. Unfortunately for a number of reasons I have not been able to find the time to expound on any of them.

At the top of my list was a marvelous run of baseball playoff games followed by a fascinating World Series. The Kansas City Royals saga is as good as any in baseball over the last decade or so. After their arrival as the surprise mystery guest at the World Series last year, many wrote them off as a one year anomaly and expected them to fall back into the muck of mediocrity. They did not.

Back again, the Royals produced a playoff run of improbable rallies surround by games of solid pitching or blowout level wins. From the seventh inning on they seemed to be invincible, except on those rare occasions when they were not.

The World Series seemed like a great match up and one in which the Royals were clear underdogs at least to many. Neither the Mets nor the Royals had won a World Series since the mid-eighties, and the Mets came into the series riding a wave of momentum with good hitting and invincible pitching. It seemed like Seaver, Koosman, et. al. were back and the Royals could never handle this sort of fire power. The quartet of hundred mile an hour fast ball phenoms seemed to have mastered most every other pitch in the books.

In the aftermath of the wreckage this World Series calls into question the old adage about good pitching beating good hitting every time. Indeed the Mets had great starting pitching which masked their weaknesses in middle relief. In four of five games the Royals exposed that weakness as well as defensive flaws in the infield and outfield, not to mention the inability to stop base-runners from waltzing into scoring position.

As to the Royals, they just kept doing what they had been doing all through the playoffs. They put the bat on the ball, ran the bases with abandon, and went into a higher gear from the seventh inning on. In the final game it

happened again but not until the ninth inning after Matt Harvey convinced his manager that it was a mistake to go to the closer. As soon as that happened it was clear what would happen next, and it did.

If you were a fan of either team this must have been an agonizing World Series with its dramatic twists and turns, but for someone like me who had no horse in the race, it was just fascinating baseball complete with highlights and lowlights aplenty.

Pitchers and catchers report in February.

Meanwhile the NFL has managed once again to overshadow the game on the field. To the surprise of no one the leading roles in this movie are being played by Roger Goodell as the incompetent and feckless Commissioner, Jerry Jones as the clueless and arrogant owner, and the promising newcomer, Greg Hardy, playing the role of innocent assault victim found guilty of assaulting his female companion.

One could say that neither the leading characters nor the plot are original. In fact they are growing increasingly stale. However there are some unusual plot twists that have sparked the interest of the public and led to some fascinating questions.

In July of 2014 Greg Hardy was found guilty of assaulting Nicole Holder. The North Carolina judge in the case expressed no doubt whatsoever about the verdict in this case of assault that took place on May 13, 2014. Immediately following the conviction Hardy's attorney announced that he would seek a trial before a jury, his right under North Carolina law. In September Roger Goodell placed Hardy on the exempt list which meant that he could not play or practice with his team, but he would continue to be paid. Some have described this as a paid vacation.

In the second trial in early February of 2015 Ms. Holder failed to appear and without her presence the prosecutor said the state not have enough to go forward with the trial. So charges were dismissed and Hardy walked away from trial two as if trial one had never taken place. Do you believe in miracles!

On March 4 Hardy requested reinstatement in the NFL and turned over documents to the league. On March 10 he became

a free agent. On March 18 he signed a one-year \$11.3M contract with the Dallas Cowboys and on April 22, Hardy was suspended for ten games without pay by the NFL. After an appeal the suspension was reduced to four games and after the first four games of the season Hardy returned to the Cowboys.

Early last week any record of Hardy's case or conviction was expunged from public records and so in the eyes of the state of North Carolina none of this ever happened. Shortly after "Deadspin" published a mass of photos showing Ms. Holder's injuries. There was shock expressed in the press and social media although the shock should have been just as great at the time of the trial. But then we live in a visual age, or so they say. Apparently Jerry Jones did not have access to the photos. Perhaps Jones doesn't or can't read, because Jerry said that the Cowboys did considerable research before signing Hardy. So we can assume Jones had seen, but did not read, the trial records for some reason.

Prosecutors in North Carolina have said that at no time in the process of the investigation of the two trials did Greg Hardy express any remorse over the incident. Instead upon his return to action he made tasteless comments about Tom Brady's wife, and noted that he would return to the field of play with guns blazing.

As Jerry Jones said recently, Greg Hardy is "one of the real leaders" on the Cowboys. Sort of like Jerry and Roger as real leaders in the NFL.

Oh, and by the way, the film will be titled "Role Models of the NFL."

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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