

Bad Behavior

4-5-1998

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Bad Behavior" (1998). *On Sport and Society*. 497.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/497>

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE

April 5, 1998

When you go off on vacation you feel as if the world stops and nothing of great significance takes place. When you return you quickly reacquaint yourself with the realities, realize that many things did happen of questionable significance, and very quickly you are back into the flow and the cool mountains of New Mexico take on a dreamlike quality.

Although seeing newspapers and television sets infrequently, the playoffs of basketball and the quest for the Stanley Cup did seep through from the distance. And of course the story of Michael's gambling habits penetrated even the most remote wilderness. And so there are impressions that sink in even from a distance.

It seems, for example, that the NBA is in danger of replicating the worst days of hockey when the Broadstreet Bullies turned the beautiful game on ice into a street mugging. A resort to excessive physical violence in sport is almost always an indication of insufficiency of skill. It is more often than not a compensation for a lack of talent. The result is an interruption of the flow and beauty of the game, a violation of the esthetic qualities of sport. The Philadelphia Flyers took hockey into a dark age with their style of play, and one can only hope that the New York Knicks will not succeed in doing the same for professional basketball.

As to Michael's gambling habits there is a tendency to wish the story away, and to deny that there is any danger presented to the NBA by this reality, whatever its scale. However it's important to remember that if anyone gets too deeply in debt to gamblers, they run the risk of being manipulated by them. No one, no matter how rich, is immune to this possibility, and those who say that what Michael Jordan does with his money is his own business, need to remember that danger.

Meanwhile in the arena, the 100th quest for Lord Stanley's Cup has ended with the Montreal Canadians winning their 24th Cup taking the final series against the Los Angeles Kings four games to one, and the last game 4 to 1. This was a remarkable final, with exceptional goal tending by Con Smythe Trophy winner Patrick Roy, and near perfect play by the Canadians who did all those little things that are necessary for winning hockey. The Canadians dominated face-offs, repeatedly blocked shots, and played disciplined position hockey in a total team effort.

Still they needed more than a bit of luck winning three games in overtime, and a bit of savvy as they literally stole game two from the Kings, when they caught Marty McSorley with an illegal stick late in the game. McSorley's blunder is nearly unbelievable as this veteran player used an illegal stick in a Stanley Cup game on the road where the chances of being caught were very high. These events turned the series completely around, as Los Angeles was less than two minutes away from taking a two games to none lead going back to their home ice. For the Kings to have won both games in Montreal would have been beyond belief, as well as devastating to the Canadians. But they did not, and for that they can credit the stupidity of Marty McSorley.

This is to take nothing away from the Canadians who won ten overtime games during the playoffs and played inspired hockey throughout.

Mention also needs to be made of Wayne Gretzky who inspired his team to victories over heavily favored opposition through the first three rounds of the playoffs. Gretzky played at times like he did ten years ago, and there were, in almost every game, flashes of the brilliance that have made Wayne Gretzky the greatest player in the history of hockey. He was the leading scorer in the playoffs.

Finally I want to make mention of two stories from the last few weeks. The first comes out of Buffalo where Grant Fuhr, the Buffalo Sabres goalie, was denied membership in a country club. Fuhr is black, and there are no black members in this country club.

About 1500 miles south in Jacksonville, the Florida Yacht Club, denied membership to Dr. Chester Aikens who is black. The Florida Yacht Club has no black members and apparently wants none. This action has cost the club the Nautica/U.S. Sailing Youth Championships scheduled for mid-June, and the U.S. Navy at Mayport now refuses to let the Yacht Club use its oceanfront land.

Sometimes it's hard to believe that it is now 1993 and not 1943. America's elite sportsmen still seem to think that their sports are above the standards of sportsmanship.

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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