

A New Year

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - A New Year
JANUARY 16, 2017

It is a new year in the world of sport and in just two weeks there have been a number of notable events and achievements. Yesterday there were two remarkable NFL playoff games that once again remind us of the unpredictability of sport and the excitement that is generated by it. Both games ended in dramatic fashion.

The Green Bay-Dallas struggle will join the folklore of both teams alongside the Ice Bowl of nearly a half-century ago. What began as a Green Bay runaway turned into a remarkable Dallas comeback, and ended with a two minute sequence of excellent quarterback play and long range field goals, each of which seemed as if it might be the last scoring play of the game.

Coming from 18 points back, Dallas tied the game with about four minutes remaining. Green Bay took the lead on a 56-yard field goal with 1:33 on the clock. Dallas tied it again with 35 seconds remaining on a 52-yard field goal. Overtime seemed likely except for the fact that Aaron Rodgers was the Green Bay quarterback. Rodgers threw a 36-yard desperation pass, but it was Jared Cook who made the play with a nearly impossible momentum defying catch while managing to remain in-bounds. The clock stopped with three seconds showing. This set the stage for Mason Crosby's 51-yard winning field goal.

The Kansas City-Pittsburgh game that followed had some end-of-game drama of its own. It also had an improbable story line in that the team that reached the end zone twice was beaten by the team that did not reach it at all. Pittsburgh's record setting

six field goals edged Kansas City when the Chiefs made a two-point conversion attempt that was nullified by a penalty. The second attempt from ten yards back failed. Final score 18-16.

Just a week earlier college football offered its version of a National Championship game with Clemson meeting Alabama for the second consecutive year. Alabama won the 2016 game with both teams putting up over forty points, and Clemson won this year's replay with both teams putting up over thirty points. In both games the Clemson quarterback, Deshaun Watson, passed for over 400 yards and had over 500 yards total offense against a team noted for its defense.

Last week's game, especially the fourth quarter, was as exciting as a football game can get. Trailing throughout, in what looked like a potential Alabama blowout for much of the first half, Clemson was able to take the lead with five minutes remaining. Alabama struck back with two minutes remaining, and Clemson scored the winning touchdown with one second on the clock.

For all of this excitement in the world of football, the biggest story in sport in the past week was the continuation of a remarkable winning streak by the University of Connecticut women's basketball team. The streak is now at 91 and still alive. The previous record was 90 straight wins set by the Connecticut women from 2008-2010.

Geno Auriemma has led U Conn to four straight national titles, eleven total. As is the fate of highly successful coaches, Auriemma has a large following of supporters and a vocal number of critics. His sustained success speaks volumes and to watch

his teams in action is to be struck by their discipline and team play, displayed equally on defense and offense.

When they played the University of Central Florida here in Orlando two weeks ago I went to see the game. UCF has a good team, although not a great team. From the opening tipoff they were dominated by the Huskies. UCF was at a great height disadvantage but the difference was the team defense of U Conn and their passing and shot making on offense. Well-coached basketball teams are a treat to watch and this team is no exception. In a game that was never close, it was never boring. Greatness seldom is

.

For those who ignore this record or seek to discount it because it is women's basketball and the competitive level of play is often low, keep in mind that there are other very good teams playing basketball. To put this streak together the Huskies had to beat those teams. In addition no matter who you play a streak of this magnitude is impressive because there are so many variables in the games and so many things that can go wrong over the course of 91 games.

It was no small achievement when the 2008-2010 U Conn women set the record at 90 and in the process surpassed the UCLA men's streak of 88. Setting this new record is not something to scoff at, ignore, or dismiss as an irrelevancy. At the end of last season when the streak reached 75 most observers predicted that this run would end early this season. Three of last season's stars were the top three draft picks in the WNBA. Clearly Geno Auriemma's 2016-17 edition of the Huskies would be in rebuilding mode.

Rebuilding mode it may be, but after the opening night at Florida State when a three point shot fell short for FSU on the last shot of the game, the streak was still alive and has not been seriously threatened since. Seven of the first twelve games of the season have been against Top-25 teams. That is not an easy schedule or weak competition. When the streak will end is difficult to know, but it will end, as all streaks do.

In recent years the other great streak in intercollegiate sport came in hockey when the University of Minnesota team won 62 straight games extending over three seasons, including an undefeated season and back to back national championships.

These achievements do not get the recognition they deserve but press coverage is the not the measure of greatness. Excellence on the field of play is, and excellence is currently on display wherever the University of Connecticut women are playing basketball. If they come to your locale, don't miss the opportunity to witness greatness.

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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