

SPORTS, TEAMWORK, COMPETITION AND SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING

William Timpson, Lloyd Thomas, Bob Meroney and David Ames
 Fort Collins Rotary Club

*Jim Halderman is a Past District Governor, district peace committee chair,
 and ombudsman for District 5450.*

In these newsletters Rotarians invite contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to educate others about addressing the pressing issues of the day with intelligence, compassion and a commitment to the greater good of humanity and the earth, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation. We also want to encourage the critical and creative thinking that can help individuals and communities move through obstacles and difficulties in more sustainable ways, i.e., with the interconnected health of all peoples, their economies and their environments.

Sustainable Peacebuilding Fellowship
Wed. January 5 from 1:30-2:30 MT via Zoom

DAVID AMES
Professor Emeritus, Colorado State University, Animal Sciences
Referee for NCAA Division 1 Football

All are invited. Share this newsletter and the ZOOM link with a friend or colleague.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/494943309?pwd=SmtTUDYzTIZrcVBhbVLRmdvbVh6dz09>

IDENTITIES AND TRUST

William Timpson, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus at Colorado State University in its School of Education and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club. He can be reached at william.timpson@colostate.edu

In my 2019 book, *Learning Life's Lessons*, and building on both Fulbright awards and Rotary funded Global Grants, I reference one of the world's sports heroes who challenged the racism of other nations. With the 2022 Olympic Games we will see the nations of the world coming together for friendly competition despite their differences and conflicts, both historic and current, and we will celebrate their accomplishments. Within nations we can also see the impact of sports when communities come together to cheer for their heroes although the subsidies needed for coaching salaries and their "guarantees" in big-time U.S. football and basketball programs can undermine college and university integrity and their budgets, adding to student debt while the welfare of players, especially those who suffer injuries, remains unaddressed once their eligibility is exhausted.

Born into a sharecropper's family, Jesse Owens moved with this family to Cleveland, Ohio as part of that great migration of African Americans from the south. He attracted national

attention with his performances in the sprints and long jump. Moving on to Ohio State University brought him international recognition in May of 1935 when he set three world records and tied a fourth during 45 minutes at the Big Ten track meet. Later at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Owens inspired millions, especially among people of color, by winning four gold medals in the face of the racist ideology of Hitler and other Nazi disciples. This new identity, however, was not able to carry him past the racist limitations of his own country for long and provide financial stability until years later. The following “tip” is adapted from #41 in *147 Tips for Using Experiential Learning*.

When anyone enters a new environment there is the opportunity to have a new identity. Too often we are known by our histories, i.e., the behaviors, skills, and abilities we have exhibited in the past. Some of these attributes may be positive and helpful, for example, our openness to new experiences. However; some may be limiting, for example, the inhibitions that can restrict our learning. Instead, we can give people the opportunity to re-create themselves in a new situation. At the beginning of a session, you can frame the challenges that lie ahead as opportunities for people to re-create themselves, especially if others in the group do not know them. This invitation can empower people to bring forward the positive traits, skills, and abilities that they want to exhibit. You can also suggest that people can adopt new names or nicknames. New identities may then mean new traits, behaviors, and skills that they can practice (Northouse, 2010).

Once in a new environment, ask people what positive traits, behaviors, and skills they want to bring forward and how they could leave the rest behind. What talents might get them wider recognition? What would inspire them to make the sacrifices that a Jesse Owens had to make to find success?



Student Association for Communicating Sustainable Peace and Development at the University of Ngozi. They are hoping that sports can help reunite a nation deeply divided by a century of colonial divisions and an imposed racist hierarchy that had favored the minority Tutsi over the majority Hutu. The teams would have to be mixed and inclusive!

Too often we become captive of the “stories” we tell ourselves, why we can’t do this or why that is impossible, especially in the face of real threats. Noted Buddhist teacher and writer, Pema Chödrön (2001), encourages us to live fully, to “smile at fear,” to go to “those places that scare us,” to embrace life in all its rich tapestry, the tough and the easy, the tragic and the fun, all those facets that are essential to the very process of life itself, to the inevitability of death and our own mortality. Jesse Owens trusted his talents and training in the face of racist judgments at home and abroad.

Chödrön insists that “(our) greatest obstacles are also our greatest wisdom. In all the unwanted

stuff there is something sharp and penetrating; there's great wisdom there. Suppose anger or rage is what we consider our greatest obstacle, or maybe it's addiction and craving. This breeds all kinds of conflict and tension and stress, but at the same time it has a penetrating quality that cuts through all the confusion and delusion. It's both things at once. When you realize that your greatest defilement is facing you and there seems no way to get out of it because it's so big, the instruction is, let go of the story line, let go of the conversation, and own your feeling completely. Let the words go and return to the essential quality of the underlying stuff" (p. 108). Jesse Owens let his accomplishments speak for themselves.

James Naismith, the inventor of the game of basketball, was born in November of 1861. Who could have predicted that this sport would grow into being one of the most popular in the world and unite all nations in friendly competition every four years at the Olympics? Fast forward to the Winter Games in PyeongChang in 2018 when North and South Korean athletes joined together in hockey at a time when headlines had been blaring about the threat of nuclear war between the U.S. and North Korea?



Initiated by three "ordinary" citizens—two carpenters and a business manager in Belfast, Northern Ireland—T.R.E.E. remains a stunning example of grassroots cooperative creativity addressing important societal needs for prejudice reduction and reconciliation within a self-sustaining economic format. Building on teamwork by Protestant and Catholic youth working shoulder-to-shoulder to learn new skills and unlearn the prejudices they had inherited from the family, friends and the community.

Reflect on those stories you tell yourself that get in the way of experiencing the richness that life has to offer, i.e., your anxieties, fears, or ambitions. Identify all those "lessons" that have made you cautious and self-conscious, eager to please your teachers, parents or bosses but increasingly unsure of your own abilities or what may be possible. How can you smile at those fears and let your talents inspire you instead?

IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns. He can be reached at [ljtad@aol.com](mailto:ljtat@aol.com)

To understand the role your values plays in your life, it might be helpful to compare yourself as a human being to an automobile. Like the engine in a car, your physiology (body), emotions, wants and needs are the “driving force” or energy provider for you to move throughout life. Your mind (thinking) is like the steering mechanism. It directs the movement of the vehicle (behavior) and guides it in specific directions. Your value system is like the “rules of the road.” The rules protect you and help you get where you want to go in a safe and efficient manner. You could also compare yourself to a favorite sports figure.

Being unaware of your *emotions, wants and needs* and not addressing them, is like turning off the ignition of your car. You won’t go anywhere. Failure to *think* about where you want to go and how you want to get there is like stepping on the accelerator and letting go of the steering wheel. You’ll move all right, but you have no control over the direction you go or the best way to get where you want to go. And without awareness of the rules of the road (*your values*), you might just drive on the left-hand side of the road or try to go in a straight line to your destination. You will be endangered and will be without guidance on the most effective way to travel toward your desired goals. So following your values allows you to be assured that how you behave is protective and supportive of you and your desired future (goals).

When we were children, between birth and 5 years of age, is when we learned and incorporated most of our values from our parents. We imitated them and learned to like what they liked and approved of. We valued what they thought was important. If they were caring, we became caring. If they spoke English, we learned to speak English. If they were friendly, we learned to value friendliness. If they were angry and abusive, we came to believe those qualities were “normal” and important. If they were fearful, we learned to fear. And the examples of valuing what our parents valued could go on and on.

When you become an adolescent or young adult, you are free to choose your own values. You tend to question, if not rebel against the values held by your parents and teachers. You seek out and experiment with alternative values to see how well they fit for you. Since you have never been an adult before, you usually don’t know what values will work best for you to adopt. So you “try out” many different ones. Sometimes the ones you choose work well for you. Some of the values you follow might be self-defeating or downright destructive to yourself, others or the world in which you live.

It is at this point in your life that learning about the past will prove very beneficial. What happened to those historical figures in sports who followed a particular set of values? What were the outcomes created by those who followed a certain value system? For the following questions, think of particular sports figures and answer each.

- Who do I admire most?
- What values did (do) they live by?
- Do I want the same outcomes for my life as they had for theirs?
- Who would I like to 'follow' to be the most successful person I can be?
- What values guide (or guided) their behavior?
- When I die, how do I want to be remembered?
- What legacy do I want to leave to my children and grandchildren?
- What values have worked best in the past to promote health, wealth, happiness and prosperity?
- What values have worked best in the past to promote teamwork, competition and sustainable peacebuilding?

Mahatma Gandhi, committed to practicing peace while challenging the colonial controls of the British overlords in India, offered these words of advice for staying positive:

- Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your WORDS.
- Keep your words positive because your words become your BEHAVIOR.
- Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your HABITS.
- Keep your habits positive because your habits become your VALUES.
- Keep your values positive because your values become your DESTINY."

FOOTBALL GAME...A METAPHOR

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D.

As the season of football games draws to a close this month, I thought it appropriate to think about the game of football as a metaphor for peace building. Most sports, as well as capitalistic endeavors, strengthens our "competitive nature." When we compete in a football game however, we usually think of how we can work as a team to achieve a well-defined goal, moving the ball to the end zone, or at least close enough to it that we could kick it through the uprights. Moving the football without dropping it or falling down is the action required to achieve our ultimate goal...winning the game. Competing in order to win at any cost always leads to divisiveness, alienation and even destroying any possible positive relationship with a perceived adversary.

Jean Vanier is the Frenchman who founded and, at age 93, continues to participate in the L'Arche worldwide community of homes where caretakers and adults with mental disabilities live together. He writes, *"When you live in a society full of competition, where you find yourself seeking only your own success, you may gain power and money, but you will end up losing what is most valuable in becoming human: to be in relationship, open to the other person. This is the vision of the peacemaker: to discover that every person is unique, whatever their disability, whatever their tribe, country, culture or religion."*

Any football player knows that cooperation and collaboration with each other is critical to not only playing the game, but also winning it. Each participant has an individual role to play. Each individual player blends his action to be congruent with everyone else on the team. When the individual or entire team violates the rules of the game, the whole team pays the consequential penalties.

Building peace requires cooperation and collaboration with adversaries as well as teammates. When playing football, two teams compete with one another. The intention of each one however, is *not* to destroy or disable the other team, it is to cooperate with one another while following specific rules governing the game. Mutual cooperation and collaboration is crucial for the game to continue. If one team doesn't cooperate with the other one in this way, the game stops. Peace building stops whenever one or more participant doesn't follow the agreed upon rules of the process. When peace building stops, all the people involved pay the consequences of failure.

The intention of all parties involved in the game of football is to "win" by being stronger, more skilled, more caring about each other and more collaborative with one another. If peace builders adopt those same intentions, I would guess that the end-game of creating a sustainable peace would be created. If any player or football organization adopts the intentional attitude of "winning at any cost," the game becomes corrupted and ultimately fails.

I hope you find the football metaphor useful in persisting in your peace-building activities. If so, you will end up winning "*what is most valuable in becoming human: to be in relationship, open to the other person*" and discovering "*that every person is unique [therefore valuable], whatever their disability, whatever their tribe, country, culture or religion.*"

SPORTS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF A NERD, A KLUTZ, AND A SPAZ:

The Failure of Sports Activities and Many Sportsmen to Encourage Peaceful Behavior

Robert N. Meroney, Ph.D. is a Rotarian and an Emeritus Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Wind Engineering with a long career at Colorado State University. He can be reached at Robert.Meroney@ColoState.EDU

There is a tendency for many to praise sports as character building, team behavior improving, and absolutely worthwhile in all cases. The value of sports competition as a role model for personal and national business and diplomatic behavior is frequently praised.¹ There is no doubt that both children and adults obtain great pleasure in developing personal athletic skills, participating in a team effort that encourages *esprit de corps*, and even the stimulation from the panoply of neurochemicals associated with athleticism, from dopamine to adrenaline to oxytocin.²

¹ API, Role Models in Sports, <https://www.athleticperformanceinc.com/blog-posts/post/19/role-models-in-sports.html>

² Brian J. Barth, [The Unique Neurology of the Sports Fan's Brain](https://nautil.us/issue/39/sport/the-unique-neurology-of-the-sports-fans-brain), Nautilus, August 11, 2016, <https://nautil.us/issue/39/sport/the-unique-neurology-of-the-sports-fans-brain>

I propose to provide a contrarian viewpoint. As a non-athletic kid, frequently teased and embarrassed for my lack of skills, chosen last in all team situations, whose "non-sports" skills were essentially ignored until late adulthood, I have a very different view of athletics. I would propose to expose the "un-sportsmanlike" characteristics of many organized sports and their participants, the teasing and mistreatment of kids not naturally athletic, the overriding demand to win at all costs, the drive to win even if one must cheat,³ use enhancing drugs;^{4, 5} or the tendency for rabid fans to use profanity, riot, and otherwise abuse teams and people they see as opponents.⁶



*Lakers Fans Riot After Game,
March 2000 - CBS News*

My viewpoint is not unique. The bullying is not limited to just the obvious non-varsity student, but includes name calling, nasty and cruel nicknames, taunting, rudeness, and threats of violence at both winners and losers. Frequently, I found that adults were reluctant to interfere with such behavior, arguing that it was better for children to solve the problem among themselves.... but actually, it was not solved at all.⁷

Bullying in sports can take a variety of forms. Common types of bullying include ganging up on team members because a "leader" on the team does not like them; harassing team members when they make a mistake during the game; targeting team members who do not perform as well as others; or, alternatively, threatening team members about doing well because they might steal the limelight.⁸

Why has abuse and humiliation remained a part of locker room culture for so long?⁹ Believe it or not many coaches and sports psychologists suggest that bullying within a team can have "positive" effects. It eliminates the "pansies" from the team who are not aggressive enough or willing to use "rough" tactics. Sometimes bullying or hazing is used as a rite of passage to obtain acceptance and pride in team membership. Many ex-servicemen justify the practice in the Army and Marines because they argue it "builds bonds."¹⁰ Destructive conflict has grown so commonplace that many athletes and supporters are willing to accept it as part of the game.



³ Amir Vera, Before the Astros, 7 other cheating scandals that rocked the professional sports world, CNN, January 16, 2020 <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/13/us/cheating-sports-scandals-trnd/index.html>

⁴ Roomy Khan, Doping in Sports 0 Cheating or Leveling Of The Playing Field, Forbes, Dec 31, 2017 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/roomykhana/2017/12/31/doping-in-sports-cheating-or-leveling-of-the-playing-field/?sh=5d140f4375ec>

⁵ On December 5, 2017, the International Olympics Committee (IOC) even banned Russia from taking the national team to the February 2018 winter games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, due to running a state-sponsored doping program.

⁶ Nathan Kalman-Lamb, Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport, Fernwood Publishing, 192 pp.

⁷ STOMP Out Bullying: End The Hate... Change the Culture <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/bullying-and-sports>

⁸ Sherri Gordon, Dealing With Bullying on Youth Sports Teams, September 26, 2021

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/dealing-with-bullying-on-youth-sports-teams-460677>

⁹ Sports Conflict Institute: <https://sportsconflict.org/effects-of-bullying-in-sports/>

¹⁰ Hope Hodge Seck, Nearly 90% of Military Hazing Complaints Come from the Marine Corps, Data Shows, Military.com, February 7, 2021 <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/02/07/nearly-90-of-military-hazing-complaints-come-marine-corps-data-shows.html>

Even in High School when I no longer had to take enforced gym classes, the tendency was for the in-group of athletes to hassle anyone they saw as different or performed better than them in classes. In one case I was standing waiting to sit down for a class to start when I was a Junior. One of the class Jocks walked up to me and hit me as hard as he could in the stomach. I was shocked and hurt, and I asked what I had done to justify the attack. He told me another Jock had paid him 10 cents to do it. No teacher or other student ever spoke up about the incident. Being slightly overweight and wearing glasses probably also made me an obvious target for those who felt athletic achievements were to be preferred over academic ones.

Vicious sports related behaviors continue into adulthood, and can transfer to competitiveness in business, marriage, and national relations. Worse yet competitive parents often provide horrible role images for their own children, the next generation of sportsmen. I have frequently watched my own grandchildren play soccer, and two of them have trained and act as youth referees up and down the Colorado front range. My referee grandkids repeatedly tell me of offensive behavior by parents and coaches attending youth-league competitions. They scream obscenities, rage at their own and opponent coaches, sometimes intrude upon the sports field, and when the young referees “Yellow or Red Card” their behavior, they are completely unrepentant.^{11,12}

How, then, has negative competitive behavior transferred into national and international activities that endanger world peace?

- Winning in sports is often the only acceptable goal. Who wants to lose? Who even wants to tie? A compromise ending in sports is a loss, yet in national or international relationships compromise may maintain peace, avoid war, prevent famine, preserve resources, and benefit the majority. Unfortunately, compromises in national or international politics have become anathema.
- Bullying or otherwise taking advantage seems to have become acceptable to many in sports competition. Is it any wonder then, that today we see large nations bullying weaker entities? Today, Russia threatens Ukraine and Lithuania, China threatens Taiwan, Turkey threatens Armenia, Saudi Arabia bullies Yemen, and the United States threatens Cuba, Columbia, North Korea, and anybody else that disagrees with its policies with sanctions.
- The obscenities and name calling practiced by sports fans has spilled over into political parties assigning nasty labels and putdowns to their opponents (Libs, Racists, Wokes, Republicrat, Flake, Deplorables, Drumpf, Fascist, Snowflake, Socialist, Populist) .¹³

I would conclude this essay by appealing to all competitors, whether in sports or other relationships to seriously consider the dark side of uninhibited competition. Garret Hardin pointed out many years ago in his essay about unfettered competition in the *Tragedy of the Commons*, that without a fundamental extension in morality and a mutual acceptance of community regulation over unregulated individual freedom... the only conclusion is an inclusive disaster.¹⁴

¹¹ Julie Scagell, [Youth Sports Referees Are Quitting Because They're Sick of Abusive Parents](https://www.scarymommy.com/youth-sports-refs-quitting-record-numbers/), March 2018

¹² Domineering Football Parents – Verbal Violence in Youth Sports, <https://youthfootballonline.com/domineering-parents-verbal-violence-in-youth-sports/>

¹³ Eliza Relman, [The most disparaging nicknames Trump used for his political enemies and former allies](https://www.businessinsider.com/trumps-most-disparaging-nicknames-of-2018-2018-12), Insider, June 7, 2019 <https://www.businessinsider.com/trumps-most-disparaging-nicknames-of-2018-2018-12>

¹⁴ Garrett Hardin (1968), “The Tragedy of the Commons”, [Science](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.162.3859.1243), Vol 162, 1243-1248. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.162.3859.1243>

UNDERSTANDING COMPETITION: POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE

Jim Halderman teaches court ordered, private, and prison-oriented anger management and communication skills. A Rotarian of 29 years he is a Past District Governor, district peace committee chair, and ombudsman for District 5450. He can be reached at jimspeaker@comcast.net.

I love playing racquet ball. It demands speed, flexibility, attention, and an element of risk. It challenges most every muscle in the body, so I also use it as my exercise. Though never the greatest player, I was able to challenge most opponents while achieving an occasional top score. It felt good. With each hit I would bring my focus to my swing, what could I do better. Occasionally, when with an exceptional player, I would ask questions in an attempt to learn, grow, and get better.

After a while, I realized the similarity of something I had taught in sales training: “The only competition one ever has is oneself.” It was to bring awareness to the challenged salesman that in any economy, in any industry, someone was making money. What were they doing that you are not? The idea would challenge our feeling of victimhood and encourage greater responsibility for our personal results.

My competition in racquetball was not my opponent but my last strike. My opponent was my teacher, my mark of position, my encouragement to do better. Yes, we each would attempt to gain the most points the quickest, to get the trophy, to get the satisfaction of “winning”.

It is when winning becomes an end, an essential “must have”. Whether in business, politics, or division of resources, competition all too often becomes an end, a must win. As Karl Marx insisted: “The capitalistic system fosters competition and egoism in all its members and thoroughly undermines all genuine forms of community.” When our primary goal is our stockholders, rather than the end user, humanism is overtaken by greed, ego, and selfishness. Sigmund Freud spoke of competition as a “primal dilemma,” ending in the Oedipus Complex.

Our country attaches its “winning” by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The market value of all goods produced in a year is our marker for success. Each year GDP must be a percentage greater than last year to know we are ahead, still winning. This leaves out the human element totally.

The Country of Bhutan has considerably improved its economic, environmental, social, and governance situation in the past four decades. It is best known for its philosophy of promoting Gross National Happiness (GNH) over GDP. GNH is defined as a balance between material and non-material values, prioritizing happiness and well-being of humans and all life. The four pillars of GNH are:

- 1) Environmental Conservation
- 2) Preservation and Promotion of Culture
- 3) Good Governance
- 4) Sustainable and Equitable Socio-Economic Development

The US, in the 2020 Gallup World Poll, dropped to eighteenth happiest nation in the world. Could that drop come from an increase in Nationalism? To me, nationalism is a sign of an overbearing ego, centered in the importance of self.

When we live with all four corners of our blanket “covered,” we can enjoy winning and can congratulate the other when defeated. To me the four corners critical for self-enlightenment are:

- 1) Physiological Wellbeing - enough to eat and adequate shelter
- 2) Feeling of Security - financial, mental and physical health and sense of safety
- 3) Social Interaction - friends, family, social engagement
- 4) Sense of Self-worth - that we belong, are recognized, and are contributing

When my four corners are filled, I find satisfaction, joy, and comfort competing. I enjoy winning while reminding myself of life’s two experiences. In life, I either win or gain a lesson.

PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities>. You can find some of our past issues at the Rotary District 5440 website: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>.