

"I've never lost a game. I just ran out of time." Michael Jordan

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BOOK STUFF

Sporty People

by Wendy Cope

I took her for my kind of person
And it was something of a shock
When my new friend revealed
That, once upon a time,
She was a Junior County Tennis Champion.

How could that happen?
How could I accidentally
Make friends with a tennis champion?
How could a tennis champion
Make friends with me?

She wasn't stupid. She read books.
She had never been mean to me
For being bad at games.
I decided to forgive
Her unfortunate past.

Sporty people can be OK –
Of course they can.
Later on, I met poets
Who played football. It's still hard
To get my head round that.

Sporting stories

Can you match up these gripping non-fiction books with the sports they are about?

1. *Fever Pitch* by Nick Hornby (1992)
2. *Touching The Void* by Joe Simpson (1988)
3. *Heaven is a Playground* by Rick Telander (1976)
4. *Open* by Andre Agassi (2009)
5. *Moneyball* by Michael Lewis (2003)
6. *Friday Night Lights* by Buzz Bissinger (1990)

- a. Baseball
- b. American Football
- c. Tennis
- d. Football
- e. Basketball
- f. Mountaineering



Fairness and competition in sport

In a recent sport blog for the Guardian, Tanya Aldred wrote:

“What is fairness? In sport, everything. From childhood, we come to see the head start in the playground race, the shove in the goalmouth, a rogue thumb on the egg (and spoon) as unjust, and quickly, loudly, ‘Oi!’ object.

The same sense of probity works its way up into professional sport. Sandpapering a cricket ball: not fair. Boxing with loaded gloves: not fair... Doping in sport: not fair. We classify our sports in order to pitch like against like and to keep people safe. From puberty, the sexes compete separately in most sports most of the time. These are long accepted norms. Or were.

Laurel Hubbard, 43, is poised to become the first transgender Olympian after being picked for New Zealand’s weightlifting team. Bubbling up to be one of Tokyo’s big stories, this fixes the spotlight on to whether trans women have an unfair advantage over biological women, and pits those sometimes friends, sometimes foes ideas of inclusion and fairness [against each other].”

What do you think?

- Should different physical size categories in sport be abolished eg flyweight, lightweight, heavyweight in boxing?
- Should there be some kind of points system to iron out physical differences such as height among the members of a basketball team, or leg length in runners?
- Can the classification categories of the Paralympics achieve fairness? Is it possible to compare impaired muscle power (through eg muscular dystrophy or spina bifida or accidental damage to the spinal cord) with amputation or neuro-diversity (through eg Down's Syndrome)?
- Should trans women be allowed to compete in women's sporting events?

Sticks

Every year Thanksgiving night we flocked out behind Dad as he dragged the Santa suit to the road and draped it over a kind of crucifix he'd built out of metal pole in the yard. Super Bowl week the pole was dressed in a jersey and Rod's helmet and Rod had to clear it with Dad if he wanted to take the helmet off. On the Fourth of July the pole was Uncle Sam, on Veteran's Day a soldier, on Halloween a ghost. The pole was Dad's only concession to glee. We were allowed a single Crayola from the box at a time. One Christmas Eve he shrieked at Kimmie for wasting an apple slice. He hovered over us as we poured ketchup saying: good enough good enough good enough. Birthday parties consisted of cupcakes, no ice cream. The first time I brought a date over she said: what's with your dad and that pole? and I sat there blinking.

We left home, married, had children of our own, found the seeds of meanness blooming also within us. Dad began dressing the pole with more complexity and less discernible logic. He draped some kind of fur over it on Groundhog Day and lugged out a floodlight to ensure a shadow. When an earthquake struck Chile he lay the pole on its side and spray painted a rift in the earth. Mom died and he dressed the pole as Death and hung from the crossbar photos of Mom as a baby. We'd stop by and find odd talismans from his youth arranged around the base: army medals, theater tickets, old sweatshirts, tubes of Mom's makeup. One autumn he painted the pole bright yellow. He covered it with cotton swabs that winter for warmth and provided offspring by hammering in six crossed sticks around the yard. He ran lengths of string between the pole and the sticks, and taped to the string letters of apology, admissions of error, pleas for understanding, all written in a frantic hand on index cards. He painted a sign saying LOVE and hung it from the pole and another that said FORGIVE? and then he died in the hall with the radio on and we sold the house to a young couple who yanked out the pole and the sticks and left them by the road on garbage day.

by George Saunders

In the contributor's notes in "Story" magazine, George Saunders writes, "For two years I'd been driving past a house like the one in the story, imagining the owner as a man more joyful and self-possessed and less self-conscious than myself. Then one day I got sick of him and invented his opposite, and there was the story."

ANSWERS: SPORTING STORIES

1. Football
2. Mountaineering
3. Basketball
4. Tennis
5. Baseball
6. American Football

