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"Self-Enslavement: The Psychoeconomics of Sports Games"

Prof. John Nash, Jr. shared the Sveriges Riksbank (Nobel) Prize for Economics in 1994 for his work on the theory of strategic games. You may have seen the related 2001 biopic entitled, *A Beautiful Mind*. Economists use Prof. Nash's theory to analyze a wide range of economic situations.

The closest most persons come to engaging in strategic games is sports games. While we may be somewhat strategic on an unconscious level (as Prof. Nash intuited) as we play games, we are considerably less analytical and more pragmatic on a conscious level when we play sports games. In certain cases, we simply resort to "luck"—whatever that is.

This brief essay examines sports games to reveal how they are designed to constrain players and spectators strategically, and how sports games align with the broader strategic games played by oligarchs and plutocrats to maintain their position at the apex of the socioeconomic pyramid.

The following are important realities of sporting games that produce the outcome just mentioned:

- Everyone familiar with sports games knows that the unstated requirement of fans/spectators is to cheer/praise vigorously outstanding efforts and positive plays. We learn this by osmosis and are conditioned to exhibit this behavior whenever watching a sports game.
- Cheers/praise become the "drug" that motivates us to participate in sports games. We are not discounting here the sheer exhilaration of competition. However, athletes live for "and the crowd goes wild…"
- To participate in sports games, we learn "rules," "train" to be in "playing condition," and study to know the "plans/plays" to execute while playing games.
- With few exceptions (off-track auto racing, golf, cross-county running, and marathons, etc.), most sports games are "confined" to a relatively small field of play. Importantly, one cannot go "out of bounds" during play.
- By playing games that are "fair" (it is illogical to play "unfair" games) we concede to limiting ourselves to a 50-50 probability: There are even chances that we will win or lose by playing "fair" sports games.

- Fans/observers of games "benefit" from surges of brain-related chemicals (including dopamine and adrenaline) that are produced as one follows game action.[1]
- Fans/observers also "benefit" from the continuous self-medication and stimulation that occur from the flow of sugar, salt, and spices in food and drink items that enter our systems while viewing games: We eat sweet, savory, and spicy snacks and drink soft drinks and alcohol.
- There is scholarly evidence that, all else being equal, there is an inverse relationship between one's "love" of games and one's commitment to fair play—i.e., one's agreeableness and willingness to "go along"—and one's economic success in life. This is consistent with the old proverb: "Good guys finish last."[2]

The foregoing "realities" infer that we are conditioned from the outset to love and to want to participate in sports games. That conditioning is reinforced by our need for acceptance and praise. Our willingness to learn and abide by rules of the game and to train condition us to willingly conform. By playing sports games, we train ourselves to limit our vision and our consideration of alternatives by adhering to the small fields of play on which most sports games are played. We learn to stick with what is before us, and not look beyond. We learn to accept that life is going to be a coin flip: Sometimes we will win, but there is an equal chance that we will lose.

Those of us who enjoy games vicariously as spectators, wed ourselves to the sports games process psychologically, mentally, and physically for the reasons given: The dosages of dopamine, adrenalin, sugar, and alcohol. On the physical aspect of our addiction to games, we often create unhealthy outcomes due to our food and drink intake during games that we observe on an ongoing basis. Notably, our sports game addiction is satisfied increasingly by a nearly endless availability of sports streaming channels today.

And while we are enthralled with the "thrill of victory and agony of defeat," eating and drinking our way to obesity, drunkenness, and the related depression, the oligarchs and plutocrats sit back in awe of their handiwork. They recognize that, like their counterparts in ancient history who organized games for the masses to keep them occupied and out of the hair of rulers, they too can enjoy the sweet comfort of knowing that underlings have willingly—and unconsciously—enslaved themselves to sports games and, thereby, to the system that oligarchs and plutocrats control.

Black Americans' preoccupation with sports games means that we have almost no time to devote to researching, exploring options for, and planning our socioeconomic rise. We humbly and willingly concede our interest in improving our and our posterity's plight. We ensure our continued economic enslavement and that of Black Americans that are to come.

The next time that we sit down to watch a sports game on television, iPad, or hand-held device, hesitate for a moment and think about what we are doing to ourselves, our children, and our children's children.

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[1] S. Muska (2017). "What happens to your body and brain when you watch football." NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/what-happens-your-body-brain-when-you-watch-football-ncna814401 (Ret. 040423).

[2] S.C. Matz and J.J. Gladstone (2018). "Nice guys finish last: When and why agreeableness is associated with economic hardship." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000220 (Ret. 0409423).

Black Americans' and African descendants' situation/condition in the US and around the globe is what we make it. Either we rise to take our rightfully deserved places as owners, managers, and controllers of life's games or we remain mainly players and fans/spectators forever.

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