

# The Sacred and the Profane in Sport

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Traditionally, sport history limits itself to the examination of the development and the occurrences of sporting activity in the human experience. However, this paper differs from this tradition in that it incorporates the historical examination with that of addressing the ultimate questions of the purpose, the conduct and the character of man in sport; in other words, it is a combination of history and philosophy. This writer contends that one cannot understand man's nature in sport without an appreciation of his existential being; therefore, this paper addresses and questions how man in sport, historically and philosophically, can be and is in conflict with two important philosophic issues: the sacred and the profane. It may seem ludicrous to discuss the sacred and the profane in relation to sport; however, if one discusses the fundamental nature of the sacred and the profane, one begins to see that historically and philosophically sport is intermingled with both. The profane is defined as the non-secular, non-religious nature of man's activities. It is those activities that deal with the non-ultimate or the everyday. It would seem that sport is concerned with this realm; however, close examination shows that sport may not be limited to the profane. The sacred or the religious experience of man is unique and different from the profane in that the sacred manifests itself to man in a *wholly* different plane on order. However, the sacred is often difficult to grasp, in religious studies, the sacred is usually defined as one of three types: normative, descriptive or functional. A normative definition states that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for sport to be the sacred, e.g., a sport must be what one does with one's solitude to be the sacred. A descriptive definition states that there are certain cases and classes that a sport must meet to be the sacred, e.g., a sport must have a dogma, a spiritual leader, a code of ethics, a form of ritual, a spiritual founder, etc. A functional definition states that there are no conditions, either sufficient or necessary, no classes and no cases which state whether a sport is the sacred. Rather, the functional definition states that one must examine the position of sport in life to discover its sacredness, i.e., a sport is individual in essence to the individual enjoying. This paper is concerned with the historical and philosophical examination of sport according to these three types of definitions. Philosophically, Whitehead, Tillich, Eliade and Wittgenstein are reviewed as to their definitions of religious studies. Historically, examples of sports heroes or sporting experiences are chronicled, examined, and critiqued according to those definitions. The heart of the paper is a cross examination of the sacred and the profane with reference to historical ritual and models in which man participates in sport.