

Television and the Attenuation of the Sports Mystique

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This paper contends that television has attenuated the mystique of sports.

The sports mystique consists of the power of sport to transport players and fans alike from the realm of everyday existence into another realm of consciousness. Unlike drugs or alcohol, sport achieves this leap out of the ordinary by intensifying and concentrating awareness. Unlike drugs or liquor, the sporting "high" can usually be achieved without the harmful side effects of hangovers, withdrawal pains, or perhaps permanent emotional upheavals. The mystique also rests on an esthetics, such art standards as symmetry, grace, and beauty. To appreciate fully the esthetics of sports, one must be a fan rather than a simple spectator.

With a marvelous array of technology at his disposal, the director of a television sports event has the tools to broaden and deepen the intensity of the experience of sports. But the technology ultimately flattens and dulls our experience of the event. It turns the event into the commonplace; then it no longer possesses a mystique. Furthermore, television makes sport too available: television so inundates the viewer that he can no longer give sports on the tube his serious attention. Fully, television destroys the distance between the viewer and would-be heroes; such distance is essential for the imagination to work. In short, for the existence of myth.