

Beyond Physical Performance: Theoretical Criteria Ideals In the Appraisal Of Sport Heroes

ROBERT KNIGHT BARNEY

University of Western Ontario

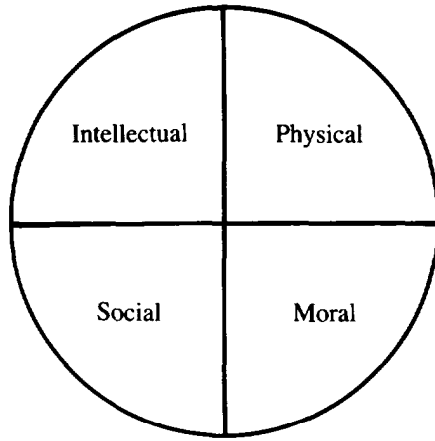
Human progress, stimulated by both individual and collective endeavor, originates more often not from the evolution of ideals and of striving towards them. Ideals, then, become targets of excellence. Those individuals in history whose human energies unfolded their potential in such a way as to more appropriately reflect the inherent ideals of a society, culture or civilization, become heroes. Further, heroes have existed, and continue to exist as models of excellence to be emulated by others. Thus, heroes are beacons of inspiration, ideals in themselves.

A central problem in studying sport heroism, especially in contemporary societies, is the fact that there is an almost indiscriminate propensity for anointing individuals as sport heroes. The indiscriminate observation is a function of isolating the demonstration of physical excellence alone, or, in effect, analyzing only **one** of several dimensions that should be scrutinized. Such narrow assessment serves to erode or lessen the value of the sport hero as a bonafide model of excellence for youth and adults alike. If heroes serve as inspirational models, it can be argued that their identification, assessment, and commemoration should be done in a thoughtful and thorough manner. Given what is at stake, can we legitimately do anything else?

Each of us harbor distinct opinions on what a hero actually is. An attempt to bring our diverse judgments a bit closer to a degree of commonality can be initiated by surveying the central ideas of those scholars who have studied the hero and the heroic in history with an intensity absent in our own personal deliberations on the subject. A consensus hero assessment value system drawn from the analyses made by Thomas Carlyle, Friedrich Nietzsche, Dixon Wecter, Sidney Hook, Orrin Klapp, and Marshall Fishwick render the following:

1. A hero personifies societal values.
 2. A hero actualizes his potential in greater respect than others.
 3. A hero is concerned with and successful in dealing with issues of social progress.
 4. A hero is a man of action.
 5. A hero's action is underscored by his method.
 6. A hero is a moulder of history.
 7. A hero is an emulation model.
 8. A hero demonstrates qualities of universal excellence.
 9. A hero strives for an ideal, never reaching it, but coming closer to it than others.
- All of the above, to greater or lesser extent, fit into a consideration of four distinct areas of human achievement: (1) the physical, (2) the moral, (3) the social, and (4) the intellectual. Each is important, and each must be considered in weighing the final measurement of a prospective hero candidate.

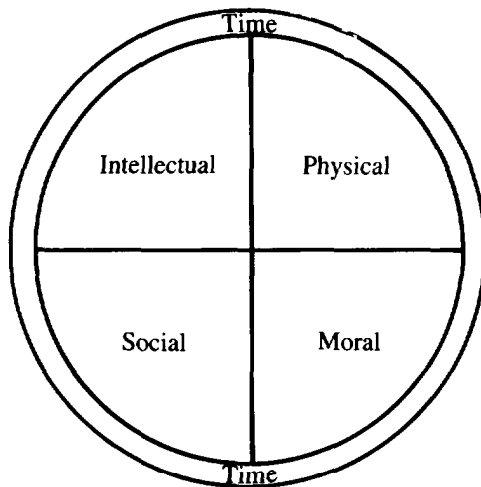
The physical realm, an all too obvious dimension of consideration in the sport hero, and often a sole consideration, denotes an assessment of health, vigor, execution of physical



feats, and performance of sport skills. An assessment of the candidate's moral realm deals with an evaluation as to how well he/she measures up in the exemplification of history's basic moral values, for instance:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| honesty | self-control |
| integrity | self-respect |
| humility | self-sacrifice |
| generosity | courage |
| modesty | ethics |
| loyalty | insight into right or good |
| Tenancy | graciousness |
| humor | sportsmanship |
| friendliness | diplomacy |
| | sincerity |

In an assessment of the social realm the hero candidate should be judged on his/her commitment to and activity on behalf of the best interest of his/her social group, be it family, community, state, country, or even mankind in the world sense. The intellectual realm, although often given short shrift by hero evaluators, especially in materialistic North American and industrialized Western nations, is, nevertheless, an important consideration, and one which completes the "universal" assessment. An assessment of the intellectual realm pays attention to both theoretical (formal education challenge) and practical (dealing with problem/choices in life) considerations.



A final consideration to place in the assessment model construct is **time**. A modern propensity towards creating sport heroes is to bestow such an accolade while deeds have scarcely been culminated. In order for a true perspective of the heroic to be judged, a gestation period of at least a generation much have occurred.

In summary, the hypothetical model offered for the assessment of sport hero candidates is one which places emphasis on the evaluation of four distinct achievement realms, buffered by the time dimension. Each is important, and for each judgement must be made. The model might appear overly severe, and one might reasonably ask, "how can any man or woman live up to the ideal posed in each of the four realms of consideration?" Hopefully, none can. If even one does, then "ideal" no longer exists. Thus, there is no excuse for setting the standard at a high level. In the final analysis, some will come closer to the ideal than others. Those that do so will be true heroes, worthy in all respects of our emulation and commemoration.

