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Good Games and Penalty Shoot-Outs

One of the perennial challenges faced by the England football team is their apparent inability to win a penalty shootout. England has the worst record in penalty shoot-outs with only a 14% success rate. Germany, in contrast, has won 83% (Wallace, 2014). If the English had sole design of the game of football today, it wouldn't include the possibility of games being decided in this fashion.

Whilst this paper is not concerned with the psychological or institutional reasons why some teams are more successful at penalty shoot-outs than others, it is concerned with the concept of a good game in terms of its relation to the fair testing of relevant skills and their aesthetic value. As such, it will consider what makes football 'the beautiful game' and what part penalty shoot-outs play, or should play, within it.

The question of what makes a good game has been considered widely in the philosophy of sport literature. It can be loosely divided into three over-lapping axiological elements: justice, ethics and aesthetics. The first tends to focus upon the way in which games are structured to ensure a fair test of relevant skills that determines the deserving winner; the second considers the way in which the game is played according to the constitutive rules and the less tangible ethos; whereas the third examines whether there is a contingent relationship between aesthetics and sport. This paper examines these elements in relation to the game of football and in particular, against Kretchmar's (2005) assertion that games such as football are inherently flawed.

The fact that penalty shoot-outs only occur because the outcome of a game has not been decided within a designated amount of time suggests that its purpose is purely pragmatic rather than being a necessary and constituent part of the game. In football, it was introduced as a practical measure to prevent time-consuming and costly replays in an ever increasing calendar of fixtures (Miller, 1996). That a practical measure is necessary to compensate for a structural weakness seems to support Kretchmar's (2005) argument that games bounded by time are inferior to games bounded by event.

Football is a sport that is limited by time in that the team with the most goals after 90 minutes is declared the winner; this is the case whether ten goals have been scored or only one. This contrasts

with other sports, such as golf and badminton where the attainment of a designated end determines the outcome; in golf it is after 18 holes have been played, in badminton, after a player has reached 21 points. Kretchmar defines the former, e.g. football, rugby, hockey, as time-regulated or t-games, and the latter, e.g. golf, badminton and tennis, as event-regulated or e-games. According to Kretchmar's argument, as t-games are inferior to e-games, football is therefore inferior to golf.

Kretchmar provides three flaws of t-games to support his conclusion; a logical flaw, a moral flaw and an aesthetic flaw. The logical flaw maintains that e-regulated games are structurally superior to t-games because they promote a positive and consistent test of the skills that define that game (he calls these 'skilful interchanges' or SIs). In contrast, time-regulated games can reward gamesmanship, which is antithetical to testing the skills inherent to that game. Kretchmar provides the example of golf to illustrate: golf is an event-regulated game whereby the result is determined by the number of shots taken to complete 18 holes. It is not constrained by time and therefore it doesn't matter if you rush around the course as quickly as possible or spend a degree of time assessing the lie of each ball. If golf was time-regulated, it would mean that the result is determined by which player had the lowest score after a set time, say four hours. This could mean that a player who was winning at the 3 hour 15 minute mark could (deliberately) hit her ball into the rough and spend the next 45 minutes looking for it before being declared the winner. As such, rather than being a consistent test of game-related skill, i.e. the ability to hit a ball accurately, the last 45 minutes is taken up by the 'skill' of looking for a ball or appearing to look for it. Kretchmar concludes that time-regulated games are therefore not a consistent test of skill, which is the exemplar of a good game. In support of Kretchmar's view, it does seem to be the case that criticism is often directed towards t-games for the time-wasting behaviour it appears to reward, for instance, retreating to a negative defensive strategy in order to hold on to a lead or avoid defeat. Time is often wasted by making unnecessary substitutions, kicking the ball back to the goal-keeper, keeping the ball in the corner and feigning injury. Whilst the clock ticks down, the skills being tested are arguably not those inherent to the game that is being played.[1] Although such behaviour is generally frowned upon, spectators and officials are often resigned to the fact that it is not explicitly against the rules and therefore must be tolerated as part of the game.

Kretchmar argues that this problem at the core of t-games leads to his second, and moral, criticism; that t-games not only do not provide a consistent test of skill but give an incentive to play the game badly. 'Badly' in this sense highlights a moral choice rather than an aesthetic evaluation (although there may be an aesthetic effect resulting from this choice). It is an agent's intention to utilise the knowledge that time is limited in order to avoid playing the game 'properly'; i.e. actively attempting to reach the designated goal using the prescribed means. Kretchmar argues that t-regulated games are morally flawed because they rely on the ethos of the game to ensure that it is played well, rather than the constitutive rules; and too often the ethos in sport, particularly professional sport, is an instrumental one which prioritises winning over playing well. Kretchmar's criticism may be reasonably supported by evidence from a range of sports. For instance, the recent law change in rugby football now prohibits stalling or time-wasting at the base of a ruck. This was necessitated because there became a tendency for teams, particularly at the top levels, to keep possession of the ball at a base of a ruck without making any attempt to play with it; they were simply running the clock down.[2]

Kretchmar argues that it is only because the game is time-regulated that this kind of stalling behaviour makes any instrumental sense. When the amateur ethos of playing the game for the sake of itself diminishes, and a more instrumental attitude takes over, stalling and other non-game related behaviour become the most rational action. In contrast, in event-regulated games, such actions would never be rational whatever attitude (whether intrinsic / amateur or instrumental / professional) it is played with.

That additional rules are required in order to penalise time wasting behaviour is a point that Davis concedes in his response to and refutation of Kretchmar's analysis,

> "T games inherently allow one to win a contest without having undergone the test that is essential to playing the game in question. If the game is to pre-empt the tactics of [time-wasting], then it needs (antistalling) rules that expressly forbid them, a device that supplements T-game logic with the logic of E games." (Davis, 2006: 51)

As Davis points out, Kretchmar appears to be correct here, since it is the case that many t-games turn into e-games due to the structural flaw inherent to them; hence, the use of e-game logic in penalty

shoot-outs. This leads into Kretchmar's third, and aesthetic, criticism of t-games. He argues that such instrumental attitudes result in behaviour that is not aesthetically conducive to a good game. Teams and individuals are motivated to take any action that runs down the clock and these actions are antithetical to the qualities that we are attracted to when we play and watch sport. Simply put, Kretchmar asserts that the structural flaws in t-games means they will also be aesthetically deficient.

The problem according to Kretchmar, is limiting a game by time leads to two equally unsatisfactory outcomes. Either we are left wondering who might have won if the game lasted as long as is necessary for the integral skills to be fully tested (i.e. without rewarding time-wasting behaviour), or we are left with a dull and tedious game that has been decided before the time has expired. As Kretchmar notes;

> "In time-regulated games, [w]e might experience a full complement of testing opportunities during a set period of time. Or we might not. And when we do not, we might feel cheated. After all, we built the game to be played for, say, 40 minutes—not to be played for 25 or 30, with the remainder spent in relatively non skillful inactivity. In short, it would be odd to construct an artificial test for the purpose of determining who is better at solving a gratuitous problem, only to have a game structure that (on occasion) favors the individual who refuses to address that very problem"(p41)

Kretchmar asserts that in the majority of t-games, the outcome has been decided before full time has elapsed. He contrasts this with event-regulated games, such as golf, tennis and snooker, whereby it is always logically possible for the opposition to claw their back into the game; as illustrated by examples such as, Ben Ainslie's inspired victory in the 2013 America Cup which saw Team Oracle turn around an 8-1 deficit to win 9-8, Europe's Ryder Cup victory in 2012, or England's Ashes test win at Headingley in 1981. If this is rightly to be called an aesthetic criticism, it must be that Kretchmar equates skilful activity with aesthetic value. However, Kretchmar's assumption as he presents it, as will be shown, is erroneous.

The problem with Kretchmar's claim, is that although this may be the case in the high-scoring t-games such as rugby and basketball that he cites, where it is unlikely that a team will come back from

a double figure deficit in the latter stages, it is far from the norm in lower scoring t-games such as football and hockey whereby the victor rarely attains more than a two goal advantage. Many of these games end with a single goal difference and it is not uncommon for teams to come back from a two goal deficit in the dying stages of a game. So, despite the fact that victory and the end of the game are logically contingent in e-games, it is perhaps t-games that allow for a more dramatic spectacle which provides greater aesthetic value.[3] In these cases, it is the restriction of time that provides value. It is this aesthetic element that provides a greater value to t-games and makes them worthwhile and popular. The discerner of the good game wishes to see the 'sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome'[4] but contrary to Kretchmar's assertion, it is a time constraint that can enhance this possibility. Kretchmar's argument that e-games are superior to t-games is based on his assertion that e-games provide a fuller test of integral skills and it is this that primarily determines the good game. However, this places too higher value on the demonstration of skill in sport as an aesthetic quality. The value of a good game, for the spectator at least, lies also in the aesthetic element of the 'sweet tension of uncertainty', which is enhanced by the awareness of time 'ticking away' and the added suspense this brings. Although a few examples of great sporting come-backs in e-games were illustrated previously, a more empirical (and less anecdotal) analysis might well demonstrate that this is more, rather than less, common in t-games than e-games. Kretchmar's purism in relation to the primacy of skill in his definition of good sport, and his focus on the ratio of skilful interchanges to non-skilful interchanges, neglects the aesthetic value for which the rationing of time provides. Kretchmar seems to concede this when he notes the global popularity of football and the criticisms directed to golf and baseball for being 'boring'. Yet, he later attempts to retract from this and states that football is an exception, insisting that the most popular games for both playing and spectating are event-regulated ones. Such a claim, however, seems doubtful.

That t-games enhance the aesthetic value of dramatic spectacle as a direct result of the limitation of time, undermines Kretchmar's criticism of t-games on aesthetic grounds. There may also be a case to reject the premise on which Kretchmar bases his argument: that t-games provide a lesser test of

valuable skills that are inherent to the game. An analysis of what constitutes skill and why it is valuable is therefore necessary.

Torres (2000) defines skill as: "…acquired, intentional, and purposeful capacities to negotiate solutions to problematic situations" (p84). Therefore, the problem in football is how to get the ball into the goal using only one's feet (or at least not using the arms, hands or other prohibited means such as a stick), whilst remaining in a defined area (the pitch), with only 10 other supporting players, whilst at the same time preventing the opposition from doing likewise. Conversely the problem in golf is to get the ball into the hole whilst using a specified club and negotiating hazards between the starting tee and the finishing hole. These skills are both physical and cognitive: the ability to know what to do and to be able to do it. The ability to solve these sporting problems are ultimately what Kretchmar meant by 'skilful interchanges' and is why Kretchmar argued that a game that maximises the number of skilful interchanges is superior to one that does not. However, I wish to argue that Kretchmar under-defines a skilful interchange and this leads to his flawed conclusion that e-games are superior to t-games.

A reasonable place to start this analysis is by considering the distinction between closed skills and open skills (Poulton, 1957; Gentile, 1972). Closed skills are those whereby variables can be controlled and the test of skill remains the same. Open skills are more complex (usually a non-predetermined sequence of closed skills) and require adaptation to changing variables. An example of a closed skill is a golf shot from the tee or kicking a ball into an undefended net from the penalty spot. An example of an open skill is dribbling a basketball around an active defender to shoot into the net or passing to a moving player whilst avoiding a tackle in football. Torres asserts that open skills are much more valued than closed skills because closed skills tend to be restorative whereas open skills tend to be constitutive. This means that when the game breaks down, say in the case of the ball going out of the field of play, a simple and effective measure to restart the game is required. The simplest and most effective measure is via a closed skill; in the case of football, to throw the ball back on to the pitch. Torres argues that the further away the action is to the central skills required by the game, the simpler and more efficient it is likely to be. A throw-in in football is a perfect example of this. Football is a

game that is primarily played with the feet; the skills inherent to the game are those which require the foot to control and manipulate the ball. The use of hands, in contrast, is prohibited with the exception of the goal-keeper who is allowed to use other aspects of her body in a designated area of the pitch in order to reduce the advantage given to the attacking player when shooting at goal. Since the game of football is predicated on the use of the feet, it might be reasonable to ask why, when the ball goes out of play along the sidelines, is the game then restarted with a throw-in rather than a kick-in. The answer, according to Torres, is that a throw-in is the most efficient way of restarting the game and allowing play to continue. Whilst it may be accepted that closed skills may be developed and advanced in technique as is the case for the development of open skills (so techniques of the throw-in have developed in order to maximise range and accuracy in providing an advantage for the team in possession rather than merely an efficient way of restarting the game) the problems that closed and open skills attempt to solve differ. Moreover, the problems that are solved with open skills are much more interesting and arguably valuable, than those that require closed skills. They are more valuable because they exemplify the aesthetic qualities that we appreciate most in sport: fluidity, creativity, spontaneity, and so on. It is this that highlights the problem with Kretchmar's argument and where he fails with his conception of skilful interchange. The value of a game can be assessed in the opportunities it allows for the use of open skills rather than skills per-se. Football is a good game because it maximises the opportunity for a greater number of open skills (and the qualities open skills highlight) to be demonstrated. The value of golf, in contrast, is diminished because it is a game which predominantly requires closed skills. The differing values attached to different skills can be illustrated in Figure 1. When presented in this way, it is clear that the game of football allows for a greater number of the more valuable skilful interchanges to be tested than in golf as the opportunities for unpredictable or novel situations requiring the use of open skills arise to a much greater extent in football than in golf.

[Figure 1.]

The problem with penalty kicks therefore is that it is a demonstration of a much more closed skill rather than the open skills that we value. A game that consisted entirely of penalties would arguably be a much less popular game than the one it is currently. Yet according to Kretchmar's argument, a game of penalty kicks would be a better one. To follow Kretchmar's argument to its logical conclusion highlights its absurdity. Kretchmar simply mis-conceptualises the value of a good game. This perhaps indicates why Kretchmar was forced to concede that football is exciting and golf is boring. Whilst it may be true that there are individuals that feel passionate about golf (or following batting statistics, or collecting stamps for that matter) and who do not find it boring in the least, it arguably requires a different type of appreciation than one that involves the fluidity, creativity and beauty provided by utilising open skills.

Nevertheless, as penalty kicks are demonstrative of a closed skill that is integral to the game of football, it is arguably the reason why this means was chosen to determine the final outcome of the game rather than a throw-in, for example. As Kretchmar and others rightly indicate, justice necessitates that the outcome of a game should be determined by the player or team who is most able to utilise the skills inherent to that game.[5] It would not be just to determine the outcome a game on skill that wasn't central to the game of football itself, such as the ability to throw a ball into the net. There are other sports whereby core skills do not determine the outcome after a set time has elapsed and the winner is still undecided. For instance, in 2009 a Cup rugby match between Leicester and Cardiff was resolved by penalty kicks. Although there will be a handful of players within each rugby team that will regularly practice place kick penalties, most players will not, since the skill to kick a ball at all, let alone from the ground at posts, is not a required part of their game. In this particular instance, thirteen penalties were taken before the winning kick was provided by a backrow forward – a player who had probably never kicked a penalty in a game before. Still further removed from a test of core skill, is the ruling in certain tournaments that stipulates if a winner hasn't been decided after a set amount of time then it will be determined on the toss of a coin. No-one would argue that the toss of a coin is a just way to decide the outcome of a sporting encounter; rather, the game should be determined on a test of relevant skill.

On this basis, it seems that penalty kicks are not the most unreasonable way in which to determine the outcome of a game. Arguably it is a quick and effective way to determine the winner when the allocated time has passed and the scores are level. And using Torres' analysis, the penalty kick appears to be the most efficient, constitutive, closed skill inherent to the game of football. Yet, despite the fact that the ability to kick a ball accurately from a set spot does reflect a closed skill required in the game of football, it still seems an unsatisfactory way to end the game. The penalty shoot-out is a different game to the game of football and, as stated at the outset, was introduced as a purely pragmatic solution to avoid expensive replays. If we wish to ensure that the outcome is decided upon the skills that are most valued within that game, then perhaps the just option is to revert to the logic of e-games and allow an infinite amount of time to score a winning goal. Whilst there have been attempts to use 'golden' or 'silver' goals (whereby additional time is added to allow the scoring of a decisive goal) the fact that these solutions are still limited by a set time (rather than letting the game go on indefinitely) appears to provide further support for Kretchmar's criticisms, as teams resort to unattractive, defensive strategies in order to ensure they do not concede the losing goal.

The ideal scenario is to ensure that the most valued skills (open skills) continue to be tested but that an outcome will be determined within a reasonably predictable timeframe, thus enabling the aesthetic features that we value about t-games to be preserved. One option is to take the approach used by hockey in recent years, which has moved away from penalty flicks (similar to penalty kicks in football) to using a system utilised in ice hockey. This tests the one-on-one ability of a player to attack the goal against the goal-keeper. Players start on the 23m line and the player has eight seconds to score a goal using the core skills within hockey, such as dribbling, feigning, dodging and shooting. Nevertheless, this approach remains deficient in the way in which it is not a full test of the skills inherent to the game of hockey, which also includes skills such as, passing, tackling, supporting, communication and teamwork. Perhaps a better approach, that preserves the most open skills found in t-games is a method used in a few other sports whereby a player is dropped from each team after a set amount of time has elapsed. For instance, in touch rugby, the rules dictate that, if after normal play the teams are drawn, then a player is dropped from both teams every two minutes, until a team has scored

or there are only three players from each team playing. This solution has the effect that it allows the game to continue and preserves the most valuable skills but also increases the amount of space available to the players in order to use those skills. On the presumption that the weakest players would be dropped from play first, it would allow the fittest and most skilful players to flourish. Let us imagine that after 90 minutes has been played in a game of football, both teams drop to 10 players for five minutes, and then continue to drop a player every five minutes subsequently. Arguably this will allow the most talented players to showcase their footballing ability. Positive play would be rewarded as time-wasting or stalling will simply result in fewer players on the pitch, and the usual defensive strategies would be undermined due to the fewer players available on the field of play. Determining the outcome of the game by using this method would not only be a more just way of providing a winner but also a demonstration of the aesthetically valued open skills inherent to the game.

In conclusion, although Kretchmar rightly identifies logical and (possibly) moral flaws with games that are dictated by time rather than event on the basis that they can encourage negative behaviour that is antithetical to the game being played, he is wrong to conclude that e-games are therefore superior to t-games. Kretchmar's conclusion rests upon the concept of 'skilful interchange' and the direct relationship between skilful interchange and game value. Whilst this assertion may be correct since a fundamental purpose of sport is the development of athletic excellence that is developed through and illustrated by skill in sport, I have argued that Kretchmar under-defines the concept of 'skilful interchange' and ignores the added aesthetic value that a rationing of time allows. A skilful interchange can have more or less value depending on the type skill it is. As such, t-games such as football tend to allow for a greater range of skilful interchange than e-games such as golf. So although it may appear that the existence of the penalty shoot-out supports Kretchmar's argument in the fact that it compensates for the logical and moral deficiencies by changing it to an e-game, penalty shoot-outs have limited aesthetic value because they are not a full test of the skills inherent to the game itself.

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NOTES

[1] There are arguments that suggest that the ability to waste time (and other forms of gamesmanship) and not be penalised for it is a skill within sport as it tests physical, psychological and / or intellectual skills, for instance, the ability to keep the ball in the corner of the pitch in football or the ability to recognise and capitalise upon loop-holes in the rules of the game.

[2] There is an argument that this action was a test of players' rugby skills in being able to control the ruck area, although admittedly it wasn't particularly aesthetically valued. See note 1.

[3] The value of sport measured by drama is further explored in Kreft (2014), Borge (2010) and Kupfer (1983).

[4] This phrase has been attributed to Warren Fraleigh (1984) and developed further by Sigmund Loland (2002).

[5] See Borge (2010), Simon (2007), Loland (2002), Breivik (2000), Dixon (1999) and Carr (1999) for a wider discussion on the place of justice and desert in sport.