

**The Place and Limits of Competition in the Physical Education Curriculum**

**Steven Piper**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Gloucestershire in accordance with  
the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts by Research, in the  
Faculty of Applied Sciences**

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## Abstract

Sports Policy in England has undergone radical change in recent years and nowhere is this better exemplified than within the Physical Education Curriculum. The Coalition Government has introduced severe cuts to the sector and a new ethos, placing competition back at the heart of their sporting strategy. This rigorously competitive structure known as the ‘School Games’ promises to build a powerful competitive legacy that will produce individuals ready to ‘win’ in all spheres of life. Such an approach completes an ideological turnaround in Physical Education which was started by the previous Labour Government in the mid-2000s, and culminated with the hosting of the 2012 Olympics in London.

This policy raises the highly contested question about the value of competition within the educational and sporting sphere. An approach based so heavily in competition might produce a generation of young people ready to work hard, accept challenges and win or lose with equal grace. However such an intense focus on competition might instead create individuals obsessed with winning, teaching them to view others as mere obstacles standing in the way of victory, on the playing field and beyond.

This thesis considers and investigates the value of competition in relation to Physical Education, primarily from a philosophical mode of inquiry. It outlines the etymology of the term ‘competition’, and how it has been perceived and valued by other cultures through history. It also demonstrates the way in which political ideology affects the extent to which competition is framed and implemented in the Physical Education curriculum. Finally recommendations are made as to how ‘competition’ ought to be conceived. This points to a moral rather than technical conception that best enables the Aristotelian concept of *eudemonia* and an ethical community.

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DEPARTMENT

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<b>DEPARTMENT/INSTITUTE &amp; FACULTY</b>	School of Sport & Exercise/ University of Gloucestershire/ Faculty of Applied Sciences
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<b>PREVIOUS QUALIFICATIONS</b> (eg BA (2i) Sociology, York Uni, 1993; MA Philosophy, Warwick Uni, 1995)	1 <sup>st</sup> BSc Sports Development, 2011
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*“...he who always hopes for the best becomes old, deceived by life, and he who is always prepared for the worst becomes old prematurely; but he who has faith, retains eternal youth. All praise then to that tale!”*

Søren Kierkegaard (1843)

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## **The Place and Limits of Competition in the Physical Education Curriculum**

### Introduction

Competition and its use within sporting and Physical Education frameworks has been, throughout history, a highly volatile, highly controversial issue which has frequently sparked debate amongst those with power and influence. Competitive sport in all its forms has been used throughout the ages for all manner of causes; educating future generations, preparing soldiers for war, as cruel entertainment and generally exposing our most base desires, showing the human race at its best, and, at its worst<sup>1</sup>.

This debate has been brought back into public discourse in England by recent changes to the Physical Education curriculum at both primary and secondary school level by the Coalition government who have – through its School Games programme – championed a return to a highly competitive structure that advocates ranking schools, pitting teams against one another within schools as well as against other schools and districts<sup>2</sup>. This highly controversial approach<sup>3</sup> is in stark contrast to the previous Labour Government which sought to use sport both in and out of school as a means to other ends (educational or otherwise), with very little focus on the competitive element. But it is not just how competitive sport has been used throughout history that ensured debate, but what competition actually *means*, what its value is to society, what it can teach, and what sort of individual it can help create. With this in mind, this thesis represents an attempt to provide a socio-historically informed ethical critique of the current policy and approach to Physical Education.

Chapter 1 considers contemporary policy, and reflects on the approaches and effects of the last two Governments. The Labour Government, whose initial direction seemed to have little to do with competition until London won the right to host the 2012 Olympic games in London, and the current Conservative-led ‘Coalition’, which used the London Olympics as a

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2 for a detailed investigation and discussion into the History of Competition in Sport.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1 will look at the ‘School Games’ programme, as well as Physical Education policy in general

<sup>3</sup> See; [www.theindependent.co.uk](http://www.theindependent.co.uk), (2014); [www.thetelegraph.co.uk](http://www.thetelegraph.co.uk), (2013a); [www.theguardian.co.uk](http://www.theguardian.co.uk), (2012a)

platform to promote their new ‘School Games’ programme that extolled the value of rigorous competition in both Primary and Secondary schools in England.

Chapter 2 concerns the history of competition and Physical Education, and explores its use by various cultures and civilisations in the western world. This chapter considers the approaches of the Ancient Greeks, whose methods and attitudes have had such an influence on thinking in this area. It also investigates the Renaissance and the Reformation, and various periods in time that (for very different reasons and purposes) helped to shape many of the important values within Physical Education as well. The chapter finishes its ‘journey’ by considering the effect of the public school system in England in the 1800s, where many of the values formed still resonate in current Physical Education approaches and policy.

Chapter 3 begins with a brief investigation into the etymological foundations of the word ‘competition’, the opening chapter then discusses the intrinsic and consequential values often attributed to competition in sport and education. The discussion centres around what values are applicable and appropriate in order to form any potential ‘working’ conception, framed principally by the work of Robert L. Simon and Jan Boxill.

In the final chapter, an attempt is made to conceive an ‘ideal’ conception of competition in Physical Education, a suggestion based on the discourse of the previous chapters and principally built on the ‘Athenian’ model of Physical Education and its chief proponent Aristotle, whose virtue ethics informs this model. By combining this model with the thinking of Robert Simon and William Morgan the thesis concludes by arguing that competition in Physical Education can and ought to be conceived in a way that promotes excellence and enables human flourishing in an ethical/moral community.

## **Chapter 1 - The Contemporary Policy Context concerning Competitive Sport and Physical Education in England**

### Introduction

Competitive sport has endured many incarnations and uses throughout history<sup>4</sup> according to whatever the philosophical, theological and pedagogical thinking was at that time, with the three systems of thought rarely in agreement.

I begin with a brief contextual background on policy of the recent past, which saw competitive sport take on various guises within Physical Education. I then move to concentrate on the previous (Labour) government, who initially considered the value of competitive sport in a much wider sense, to promote virtuous goals both for the individual and their communities but who then moved back to a more traditional, structured and rigorously competitive approach. Finally, I discuss the current Coalition government's sport policies and decisions, paying particular attention to changes they have made during their time in power, namely the introduction of the 'Schools Games' programme; a programme, I argue, which rallies against the virtuous notions of competition originally conceived by the Athenians in Ancient Greece<sup>5</sup>.

### Brief Policy Context of the Recent Past

Competition (within Physical Education) has been defined and valued in various ways throughout human history, and this extends to the way it has been conceived in England. As part of Physical Education, competition has been used in an attempt to 'solve' all manner of issues, held up as a 'fix' for everything from tackling sedentary lifestyles, social exclusion and crime, as well as the slightly more traditional associations such as increasing physical activity and providing pathways into performance sport. There have been many claims about how competitive sport and Physical Education can tackle a range of issues and agendas<sup>6</sup> as

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<sup>4</sup> As will be shown in greater detail in Chapter 2

<sup>5</sup> Again, this subject will be discussed in Chapter 2

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, (2005); Burt, (1998)

well as how it can improve educational attainment<sup>7</sup>. The previous Labour government had long extolled the virtues of competitive sport and Physical Education during their thirteen year period in power, although, as will be explained later, not always in a consistent way. Nevertheless their approach was in contrast to earlier governments whose interest in competitive sport and Physical Education, in terms of policy, was minimal<sup>8</sup>. The approach by the Coalition government has been light on policy and heavy on action, where a mixture of cuts and restructuring in the wake of the 2012 London Olympics has ensured great changes within the sector.

It is pertinent at this early juncture to state that my focus is on the concept of competition when used in Physical Education, and that while I provide an etymological analysis of competition I have not been able to do so to the same extent with the concept of education. However, the chapter outlining the history of physical education demonstrates how it has been previously conceived and understood<sup>9</sup>. Instead I will adopt McNamee's (by way of various scholars) attempt to understand Physical Education and its value. I take this stance in view of McNamee's writing on the subject, which leads him to purport that:

“Those looking for *conceptual* unity [concerning Physical Education] are simply wasting their time.”<sup>10</sup>

McNamee goes on to elucidate on this assertion by explaining that there are *similarities* across different sporting activities, but that that is not enough for anyone to attempt any sort of conceptual analysis. In identifying the “...inherent openness of the concept of physical education: pluralism in activities; pluralism in values...”<sup>11</sup> we accept that no foundational concept can be applied. However, this openness of concept does not prevent us considering Physical Education - and Education more widely – a cultural practice which provides us with further opportunities to live a full and worthwhile life; *viz.* the Ancient Greek concept of *eudaimonia* (flourishing)<sup>12</sup>. Physical Education fits the criteria because, on McNamee's

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<sup>7</sup> Coalter, (2005, 2002); DCMS/SEU, (1999); Long and Sanderson, (1998)

<sup>8</sup> Houlihan and Green, (2006)

<sup>9</sup> That Chapter is Chapter 2

<sup>10</sup> McNamee (2005, p17)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> This concept will be explored in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 4

account, the activities that take place within Physical Education can be regarded as ‘mixed goods’<sup>13</sup>, because;

“...they have the capacity to be valued not only for their internal goods but also for the particular manner in which they secure external goods...”<sup>14</sup>

Thus Physical Education, as valued cultural (sporting) practice can inform and educate, serving various social, cultural and political goals, and contribute to living a well-rounded, virtuous life and justify its value in (and as part of) Education generally.

But even these wide parameters have limits, and so, rather than attempting to shoe-horn all that supposedly encompasses Physical Education and its activities into one neat box, Reid suggests we should instead consider the cultural, historical and political ‘factors’ that have shaped each activity in order to find shared values and processes between these activities<sup>15</sup>. This direction takes us back to McNamee’s assertion that by doing this we discover ‘similarities’, and that these similarities ensure ‘value pluralism’ and highlights why providing a neat analytical definition of Physical Education is unfeasible.

With this clarification I move to discuss the policy context in which this thesis is situated, beginning with a brief investigation of the trends and values that consumed educators in the past.

Historically, competitive sport, and consequently Physical Education, has been perceived to have many benefits<sup>16</sup>; in the early 1900s, the government introduced a model of Physical Education as part of schooling that claimed benefits for general health, posture and as a tool to improve pupils’ discipline and concentration<sup>17</sup>. The effect of the Second World War stimulated a more scientific approach to exercise and health and the relationship between the two<sup>18</sup> and the syllabus quickly reflected this. By the middle of the twentieth century emphasis had moved from physique and posture to physical fitness<sup>19</sup>. The social benefits of competitive sport, though not stated clearly in early government policy, influenced the decision during

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<sup>13</sup> A fuller account and explanation of ‘mixed goods’ can be found in McNamee, (2005, pp 1-17)

<sup>14</sup> McNamee, (2005, p16)

<sup>15</sup> Reid, (1997)

<sup>16</sup> To be discussed in the next Chapter

<sup>17</sup> Bailey *et al*, (2006)

<sup>18</sup> McIntosh, (1968)

<sup>19</sup> Bailey *et al*, (2006)

that time to use competitive sport and Physical Education in schools, as it could be used as a way of reinforcing discipline and obedience<sup>20</sup>. The games ethic of private schools, that of developing leadership qualities and team spirit<sup>21</sup> was transferred to state schools in the hope it might reduce and prevent antisocial behaviour, an ideal rooted in ‘muscular Christianity’<sup>22</sup> and the development of spiritual and moral purity through physical enterprise and the underpinning of values such as fair play, self-control and loyalty<sup>23</sup>. These social benefits could then be passed onto working-class youth; indeed, moral and spiritual development continues to play an important role in the current school curriculum, in the teaching of PSHE (Personal Social and Health Education)<sup>24</sup>.

In the 1950s the introduction of secondary schooling meant that the education system had more influence upon the general population than ever before<sup>25</sup>. Competitive team games came to hold an important symbolic significance to physical educators (as well as politicians) in readily translating the ideal of egalitarianism. This was achieved by promoting a conflict-free society by redirecting aggressive impulses that would otherwise lead to delinquent behaviour and foster a more stable society, by providing a desirable alternative to youth culture<sup>26</sup>. This was an attitude not dissimilar from that of Rousseau in the mid-1700s<sup>27</sup> and one that would be mirrored by the Labour social exclusion agenda in the late 1990s, as competitive sport became a ‘connective specialism’ to distract<sup>28</sup> and prevent criminal behaviour and tendencies.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, competitive team games were central to Physical Education, with ‘scientific functionalism’ being the pervading ethos throughout the country<sup>29</sup>. This approach concerned ideas such as the destructiveness of conflict, embracing conformity, rejecting difference and further legitimizing aggression, ‘natural’ competitiveness, and the need to identify against a common enemy<sup>30</sup>. These values were brought to their peak by the Thatcher-led Conservative government in the 1980s, and were not reconsidered in any

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<sup>20</sup> Kirk, (1998)

<sup>21</sup> Mangan, (1986)

<sup>22</sup> More on ‘muscular Christianity’ in the next Chapter

<sup>23</sup> Watson (2007); Watson *et al*, (2005)

<sup>24</sup> www.ofsted.gov.uk, (2014)

<sup>25</sup> Kirk, (1992)

<sup>26</sup> Muncie, (2002); Kirk, (1992)

<sup>27</sup> More on Rousseau in the next Chapter

<sup>28</sup> Penney and Evans, (2002)

<sup>29</sup> Kirk, (1992)

<sup>30</sup> Hargreaves, (1986)

substantial way until the Labour government in the late 1990s, which led a series of Policy Action Teams, one of which was to consider the role of competitive sport in wider society<sup>31</sup>.

### Contemporary Research Context

Competitive school sport in Physical Education has been the subject of many beneficial claims and assumptions since its inception and this section will explore some these assumptions and their origins.

Many policy documents in the more recent past have sought to highlight the benefits of competitive school sport in a range of different areas as far ranging as social inclusion<sup>32</sup>, improving the pool of participants available for elite performance<sup>33</sup> and increasing pupils' attendance<sup>34</sup>. The creation of the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR) in the 1930s and the publishing of the *Wolfenden Report* in 1960 was an expression of the belief in the social benefits of competitive sport, specifically for the working-class<sup>35</sup>.

The impact of competitive sport at an individual level within school is often cited as a way to provide opportunities that benefits both the individual and the communities and groups they inhabit<sup>36</sup>. It is claimed that improvement of an individual's personal qualities through sporting social inclusion, such as teamwork and fair play<sup>37</sup>, can produce enhanced self-esteem and sense of control over one's life<sup>38</sup> as well as an outlet for self-expression<sup>39</sup>. These outcomes might come about indirectly, as a result of using competitive sport in partnership with other aspects of the curriculum within the educational setting<sup>40</sup>. Competitive sport can positively contribute to other areas of the curriculum, by improving social skills, creating role

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<sup>31</sup> Houlihan and Green, (2006)

<sup>32</sup> This was one of main issues to come out of Policy Action Team 10's findings in 1999, which was published on behalf of the a joint effort between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Social Exclusion Unit.

<sup>33</sup> One of the main goals in the policy document '*Playing to Win*' (DCMS, 2008)

<sup>34</sup> A recurring theme in the document, '*Learning through PE and Sport*' (DFES/DCMS, 2003)

<sup>35</sup> Bloyce and Smith, (2006); Bailey *et al*, (2003)

<sup>36</sup> Bowtell, (2006); Coalter, (2002); Collins *et al*, (1999); Thomas, (1995)

<sup>37</sup> What Bailey (2008, p86) refers to as 'pro-social outcomes'.

<sup>38</sup> Nichols, (2007); UN (2002)

<sup>39</sup> McCormack, (2001)

<sup>40</sup> Coalter, (2005)

models and leaders through peer-related learning<sup>41</sup>. Sport can also be used as a form of peer integration for young people with disabilities, using competition within the Physical Education environment as a ‘normalising’ experience<sup>42</sup>. In this way competitive sport becomes a ‘connective specialism’, a platform to facilitate different forms of learning through engagement of sport<sup>43</sup>. It can be used as an instrument for identity transformation for an individual, allowing them to constantly adapt change or reject new identities that are created through and around sport<sup>44</sup>.

There are, however, negative aspects to the use of competitive sport in school settings, namely that sport can often highlight differences as much as it can commonalities, be that between different schools or individuals<sup>45</sup>. Individuals especially can experience negative self-concepts through competitive sport<sup>46</sup> and feel vulnerable as a result, while strict adherence to rules means that often young people reject traditional sporting endeavours, such as competitive team games<sup>47</sup>.

Despite such reservations there are many positives to be taken from competitive sport; namely that they can improve communication between pupils and enhance leadership qualities<sup>48</sup> and enhance cognitive benefits, improving educational attainment and have transferrable effects to other areas of the school curriculum<sup>49</sup>. Further to this, competitive sport provides a setting in which individuals can attempt to achieve a goal or set of goals within a ‘motivational climate’<sup>50</sup>. This ‘motivational climate’ encourages the participants to attempt to learn new skills, with an emphasis on personal development and accomplishment, rather than focus on extrinsic demands, like winning and pleasing others<sup>51</sup>. Such an emphasis<sup>52</sup>, rather than on traditional competitive rewards, seems to be key to positive views on competitive sport<sup>53</sup>. These positive attributes then contribute to pupils’ general levels of

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<sup>41</sup> Nichols, (2007); Goldson and Muncie (2006)

<sup>42</sup> Taub and Greer, (2000)

<sup>43</sup> Penney *et al*, (2002).

<sup>44</sup> Maguire *et al*, (2002)

<sup>45</sup> Maguire *et al*, (2002); MacClancy, (1996)

<sup>46</sup> Biddle, (1999); Fox, (1992)

<sup>47</sup> Sugden and Yiannakis, (1982)

<sup>48</sup> Miller *et al*, (1997); Priest and Gass, (1997)

<sup>49</sup> Bailey *et al*, (2006); Pirie, (1995)

<sup>50</sup> Ames, (1992)

<sup>51</sup> Wankel and Kriesel, (1985)

<sup>52</sup> Called ‘task mastery’, (*Ibid*)

<sup>53</sup> Escarti and Gutierrez, (2001)

happiness and the development of positive long-term attitudes towards healthy, active lifestyles<sup>54</sup> and to competition itself.

Since the introduction of Physical Education into schools, there have also been many claims made about its intrinsic and extrinsic benefits<sup>55</sup>. Policy makers are still attempting to address inequalities, advocate sport for its own sake and attempt to extol the wider social benefits of Physical Education and competitive sport within the constraints of government whilst keeping both the school sector and the general public satisfied. History has shown that both competitive sport and Physical Education is open to reinterpretation and change, and this is replicated in today's policy. Politicians, academics and educators alike - influenced by scientific research, public perceptions and fashionable theory continue to use competitive sport to fight a number of ideological battles.

Turning our attention now to the previous Labour government (1997-2010), and the policies that shaped their time in government, we consider a period that had a highly influential effect on the direction of competitive sport and its use, from the late 1990s to the present day. Beginning with the initial years, which set the foundation for the use of competitive sport as a tool for 'social good', before focussing on the last eight years of their time in government, where an extraordinary ideological U-turn saw them support London's bid for and win the rights to host the 2012 Olympics in London.

#### The Labour Years: Sport and the 'Social Inclusion' Agenda - 1997-2001

The Labour years represented a period of great change for competitive sport in Physical Education and within Physical Education itself. Driven by a strong economy in the late 1990s and large majorities in parliament when elected in 1997 (and re-elected in 2001 and 2005), Labour were able to follow an ambitious policy of 'joined-up thinking'<sup>56</sup> that incorporated competitive sport and Physical Education into a wider programme of community, school and

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<sup>54</sup> Bungum *et al.*, (2000); Greenwood *et al.*, (2000)

<sup>55</sup> A detailed investigation of these values will take place in Chapter 3

<sup>56</sup> 'joined-up thinking' is a term that refers to "look[ing] at the whole picture of sports provision rather than separating it out into discrete areas." (Hylton and Branham, 2008, p33)

elite sport. This programme<sup>57</sup> would attempt to tackle broader government policy targets such as social exclusion, childhood obesity, youth crime and poor participation levels in sport and physical activity. Indeed, it was a programme very much driven by concerns for wider improvements in well-being, rather than narrower internal sector goals. The first part of this section will discuss the key early policy documents that shaped the direction and thinking of the Labour Government and the plans it laid out for competitive sport and Physical Education. These early policies were eventually crystallised in two policy documents, namely *Game Plan: A strategy for delivering Government's Sport and Physical Activity objectives*<sup>58</sup> and then, six years later (and in stark contrast to *Game Plan*), *Playing to Win: A New Era for Sport*<sup>59</sup>. These seminal policy documents had a profound effect on the pedagogy and philosophical direction of competitive sport in Physical Education and represent polar opposites of the ideological scale of sports policy, and, in particular whether or not competition should lay at the heart of physical education in schools.

The policy document *Game Plan*<sup>60</sup> was the culmination of a myriad of different policy documents, publications and research work. Its central philosophy was borne out of the previous Government's belief at the time that competitive sport, along with many other activities, could be used as an instrument to tackle 'social exclusion'<sup>61</sup>. The Labour Government adopted this idea as a key policy initiative<sup>62</sup> and embarked on an investigation into the power of sport for social good, the ramifications of which would forever change sports policy and governance in this country in a way that had not been felt since the *Wolfenden Report* some thirty-seven years earlier. The report had highlighted the links between sport and physical activity as a tool to prevent the socially excluded, in particular young people, from developing criminal habits<sup>63</sup>.

The Government's first policy document *Bringing Britain Together*<sup>64</sup> identified many fundamental issues within British society, as well as various policy initiatives from past governments that had tried and failed to rectify the ever increasing divide between rich and poor<sup>65</sup>. Included in this document was the creation of 18 cross-cutting action teams which

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<sup>57</sup> Along with other government policies, which will be discussed in due course.

<sup>58</sup> DCMS/SEU, (2002)

<sup>59</sup> DCMS, (2008)

<sup>60</sup> DCMS/SEU, (2002)

<sup>61</sup> Bailey, (2008); Nichols, (2007)

<sup>62</sup> Malcolm, (2008)

<sup>63</sup> CCPR, (1960)

<sup>64</sup> SEU, (1998)

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*

would challenge a number societal issues under five broad themes: getting people to work, getting the place to work, building a future for young people, access to service and making the government work better<sup>66</sup>. Of the 18 teams, later known as *Policy Action Teams (PAT's)*, it is *Policy Action Team 10 (Arts and Sport)* that would form much of the research foundation for *Game Plan*.

*PAT 10* (1999) was itself informed principally (but not exclusively) by Collins *et al's* *Research report: Sport and Social Exclusion*<sup>67</sup>. In it, it describes and defines social exclusion and its relationship with a 'severe lack of opportunity' as well as extolling the potential benefits of sport and physical activity, while recognising potential constraints with the use of sport as well<sup>68</sup>. This research underpinned and informed many of the recommendations in the Social Exclusion Unit's *PAT 10* document, a document that would provide the framework for many now widely held conventions in sport policy. *PAT 10's* central claim was that the arts and sport had the potential to reduce health inequalities and improve communities 'performance'<sup>69</sup>, addressing neighbourhood renewal in four key indicators: Health, Crime, Employment and Education<sup>70</sup>.

The document also provides evidence of schemes that tackle social exclusion and health issues<sup>71</sup> addressing crime using competitive sport and/or the arts as a diversionary tool and 'hook' to attract young people<sup>72</sup>, becoming a conduit for all sorts of different activities and opportunities, both sporting and non-sporting<sup>73</sup>. *PAT 10* also provides case studies of competitive sport and the arts challenging issues in employment, education and growing industry<sup>74</sup>, directly answering problems that *Bringing Britain Together* first brought to light in the previous year.

Collins *et al* (1999) and consequently *PAT 10* (1999) provides the evidence and values upon which *Game Plan* is so heavily founded on. The early work by Collins *et al* set the precedent

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<sup>66</sup> SEU, (1998)

<sup>67</sup> Collins *et al.*, (1999)

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>69</sup> SEU, (1999, p22)

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, (p23)

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, (p24-25)

<sup>73</sup> Nichols, (2007); Taylor *et al.*, (1997)

<sup>74</sup> SEU, (1999, p25-30)

for what was to come and bred further work before<sup>75</sup> and after<sup>76</sup> *Game Plan*, up until the *Playing to Win* (2008) policy document was published.

### The Labour Years: Defining and Redefining their Sporting Philosophy - 2002-2010

This brief analysis of the two policy documents will investigate and evaluate the themes and policies that have shaped competitive sport within Physical Education for much of the past three decades. Citing examples from both research and practice, it will attempt to unravel and understand what each document (and by proxy the former Labour Government) was hoping to achieve and also point to how these documents that have influenced current Coalition policy and initiatives concerning the use competitive sport.

As discussed, *Game Plan* (2002) has its roots in a broadly sports development-inspired social inclusion agenda which was brought about by various policy documents, most notably seen in the joint efforts of the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and the Social Exclusion Unit. This direction was pursued with enthusiasm until 2005, when London successfully bid to win the 2012 Olympics. Three years later the government released its replacement which represented a shift in ideology; *Playing to Win: A New Era for Sport*, (2008) along with its companion piece *Sport England Strategy 2008-11*, (2008).

As the title suggests, *Playing to Win* represented a radical change in direction for those involved in sport and sport policy. The social inclusion and ‘sport as an instrument for social change’<sup>77</sup> was dropped in favour of the more traditional ‘sports for sports sake’<sup>78</sup> as the Olympics inevitably began to shape the sector as a whole.

The stark contrast between the two documents can be best summed up by their respective (broad) recommendations; *Game Plan* concentrates on using competitive sport to increase grassroots participation and tackle issues surrounding social exclusion in the community and

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<sup>75</sup> For example: Coalter *et al*, (2000); Bryant, (2001)

<sup>76</sup> DCMS, (2004); Delaney *et al*, (2005)

<sup>77</sup> Houlihan and Green, (2006)

<sup>78</sup> Sport England, (2008, p1)

beyond<sup>79</sup>. It also has relatively little to say on elite competitive sport and contains only a short chapter on mega events such as the hosting of the Olympics which mostly warns against bidding without ‘clear assessment’ and suggests a ‘more cautious approach’ should be taken<sup>80</sup>.

*Playing to Win* and the accompanying *Sport England Strategy* meanwhile is devoted to themes omitted in *Game Plan*, with little mention of community except for a new emphasis on improving coaching facilities and giving access to better coaching in relation to performance sport<sup>81</sup>. In the *Sport England Strategy* under the headline ‘Creating opportunity for all’ the document simply reads “[t]here is a need for new thinking in this area. All young people in particular should get a range of opportunities”.<sup>82</sup> This strongly contrasts with the values put forth in *Game Plan* barely six years earlier<sup>83</sup>. *Playing to Win*, although carrying some continuity of *Game Plan*, is arguably a return to the very values *Game Plan* openly rejected and contradicts much of evidence that *Game Plan* was built upon<sup>84</sup>.

Nevertheless, both documents have been highly influential. *Playing to Win* returns to the more traditional values found in public school system, and extolls the virtues of ‘sport for sport’s sake’. But post-Olympics it is unlikely to have the universal relevance that *Game Plan* had, and the way in which it saw the potential that sport had to benefit wider society. The speed of the ideological turnaround by the Labour Government of the time was stark and might be better understood in the fullness of time. But, suffice to say, *Game Plan*’s aspirations, underpinned by robust evidence, represented something of a high-water mark for sports policy of this type, of tackling and possibly changing social inequalities in England, principally from the platform of competitive sport.

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<sup>79</sup> DCMS/SEU, (2002)

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, (p12)

<sup>81</sup> DCMS, (2008, p15)

<sup>82</sup> Sports England, (2008, p4)

<sup>83</sup> Despite the reservations concerning the costs and value of ‘mega events’ in *Game Plan* back in 2002, the government bid the Olympics just three years later and upon winning the bid in 2005, the cost promptly skyrocketed from £2.4 billion to just over £8.77 billion (www.bbc.co.uk, 2013)

<sup>84</sup> The decision, for example, in the *Game Plan* document to compare the UK’s participation rates with that of Finland, Sweden and Australia were aspirational at best, and naïve at worst (DCMS/SEU, 2002, p15) but did at least address this issue seriously. *Playing to Win* also addresses participation rates but is rather less bold in its predictions and make no such comparisons, suggesting it hopes to merely ‘maintain current participation rates’ (DCMS, 2008, p 9)

At the centre of *Playing to Win* is sport's role in the accustomed setting of performance, achievement and the rigorous ethos of competition, thus discarding *Game Plan's* communitarian philosophy. The present Coalition government have continued to embrace the direction of the *Playing to Win* document, bringing back the agenda of rigorous competition in schools, with its introduction of the 'Schools Games' programme.

### The 'Coalition' and the 'School Games' programme: A Return to Traditional Sporting Values

2010 saw the end of Labour's period in power and the election of a Conservative-led Coalition government. Despite this change, the ideological shift towards a focus on competition that had begun in 2005 (when the previous government won the right to host the Olympics) and culminated in 2008 (when *Playing to Win* was published) continued under the Coalition. Their focus was directed by the Legacy promises which won the Olympic bid, but also their wish to 'embed' competitive sport more fully into the curriculum by way of a new programme for both Primary and Secondary schools called the 'School Games'<sup>85</sup>. The structure of the Games is made up of three levels of activity: competition in schools, between schools, and at a county/area level:

- **Intra-school (Level 1)** – sporting competition for all students in school through intra-school competition
- **Inter-school (Level 2)** – individuals and teams are selected to represent their schools in local inter-school competitions
- **'Sainsbury's' School Games Festivals (Level 3)** – county/areas stage multi-sport Sainsbury's School Games Festivals as a culmination of year-round school sport competition<sup>86,87</sup>

This approach was robustly pushed through by the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, a conservative traditionalist, who introduced the 'School Games' programme in 2010 to lead

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<sup>85</sup> DfE, (2011)

<sup>86</sup> [www.yourschoolgames.com](http://www.yourschoolgames.com), (2014a)

<sup>87</sup> Teams, which are ranked both in and out of school according to their performances, regularly have their 'profile' updated by the organisers (The Youth Sport Trust) who post results via social media. ([www.2014schoolgames.com](http://www.2014schoolgames.com), 2014b)

into the London Olympics in 2012, while implementing deep cuts across the sector<sup>88</sup> that reflected the economically austere approach the Coalition have taken since gaining power. From the beginning the Coalition was clear on the direction, purpose and use of competitive sport, both in and outside of the Physical Education curriculum;

“The Government is committed to delivering a sporting legacy for young people, bringing back a culture of competitive sport in schools....levels of competitive sport are not as high as they should be.”<sup>89</sup>

In the same document, which outlines the Coalition’s new direction for sport, it states a need to address a lack of opportunity for regular competition between pupils because “teachers know this boosts concentration and feeds through directly into improved academic performance.”<sup>90</sup>. The plans also called for a ‘renewed focus’ on competition, which, along with explicit ties to the Olympics, would provide a “truly inspirational sporting legacy for young people.”<sup>91</sup> during and after school life.

In 2010, there was, in a similar vein to the previous government, an understanding that competitive sport<sup>92</sup> could be used as a form of enrichment, to encourage pupils interest in their studies (albeit with a less academically rigorous foundation), and in their education generally<sup>93</sup>. In the same year, a Department for Education White Paper recognised that competitive opportunities need to be improved to “entrench the character-building qualities of team sport”<sup>94</sup> more explicitly into the curriculum, (namely through the School Games programme). Competitive sport and Physical Education is often mentioned in terms of what was seen by the Coalition as a need to introduce a more competitive structure generally into Education<sup>95</sup> both for staff and pupils, in order for the UK to continue to be ‘internationally competitive’ economically<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> The ring fencing of funding (around £162 million a year) was removed, although £65 million a year was pledged instead. (DCMS, 2012)

<sup>89</sup> DCMS, (2010a, p2)

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, (p3)

<sup>92</sup> Along with music and drama (*Ibid*, p15)

<sup>93</sup> DfE, (2010, p40)

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, (p48)

<sup>95</sup> Which - as discussed in Chapter 3 - is now a reality, with the introduction of performance-related pay for teachers

<sup>96</sup> DfE, (2013)

Since the Olympics, Prime Minister David Cameron has advocated the reintroduction of rigorous competitive sport into schools and the success of the School Games and also the sort of individual such a policy would produce. In a statement in which he announced that competitive sport would be made compulsory in primary schools he said;

“We need to end the 'all must have prizes' culture and get children playing and enjoying competitive sports from a young age.”<sup>97</sup>

While this announcement caused concern for many in the sector, including the National Association of Head Teachers, which called for further investment in “a wide range of school sports”<sup>98</sup> (rather than prescribe specific types of sport). Cameron’s comments were supported by Damien Hinds, at the time a member of the Education Committee, who stated that;

“...competitive sport taught children the power of a team, pushing yourself, and learning that life involves losing some things as well as winning.”<sup>99</sup>

This quote, along with Cameron’s comments, demonstrates the way in which the Coalition Government saw competitive sport as a tool for various means; whether education, building positive character traits or creating robustly competitive individuals ready for the workplace. What began with Labour and the winning of the Olympics has evolved (through the ‘School Games’ programme) into a highly structured, systematic way of ranking individuals and teams against each other, at nationally, locally and individual levels, reinforcing what is often described as a hyper-competitive environment where pupils are under constant assessment and testing. The School Games programme and the surrounding Coalition policy is clearly and explicitly part of a wider agenda from the government to produce competitive, effective, driven individuals that can readily improve and succeed in the workplace. Seen in this way, competitive sport has returned to its public school roots of the late 1800s.

Just below the surface of the Coalition’s ‘Schools Games’ program is a clear mandate to instil competitive, business-like attitudes in young people, and prepare them *for* (and most importantly succeed *in*) life after education, specifically becoming productive workers in an

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<sup>97</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), (2012)

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*

increasingly competitive market economy. On the face of it; such an approach seems a sensible, pragmatic way of motivating and priming young people for the highly competitive world of work, however there are signs that such approach could have negative effects, both short and long term.

The reason that such an approach is problematic is that it leaves no room for those who do not immediately respond to competition, for those who do not embrace the system, the structure, the rigours of competition and competitive sport. The result of such an exclusive attitude inevitably leads to alienation for some pupils and although it is fair to say that young people are not demonised in quite the same way as they were in the 1800s<sup>100</sup>, this is still an approach that excludes those that don't 'buy in' to the competitive ethos.

As can be seen in this brief history of sports policy in England, I have shown that, (much like the majority of the history of competitive sport), various influential groups, from politicians to educators have attempted to use competitive sport to and for various ends, with mixed success. What is clear is that history continues to show that the conception of competitive sport, how it is used and valued, is constantly under scrutiny and change, but also that many themes emerge which – as I intend to show in the next chapter - have their beginnings hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago and are tied to the overall progression (and sometimes regression) of 'society' as we know it today.

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<sup>100</sup> This will be explained in detail in Chapter 2

## **Chapter 2 - A History of Competitive Sport and Physical Education**

### Introduction

The use of competitive sport in Physical Education, and the value of Physical Education itself - as we have seen in the previous Chapter - continues to be a subject of great ideological tension between the political parties in England. What competition within that represents, what outcomes are tied to it, and even what sort of person it produces, are perennially a matter for discussion and debate. In contemporary society, competitive sport has been used as a tool to tackle social disorder, prevent social exclusion and – in the case of the 2012 London Olympics – as a catalyst to leaving a lasting physical activity and health legacy in Britain<sup>101</sup>.

These political and ideological battles are nothing new; indeed, many of the issues outlined in the previous Chapter have been recurring for hundreds, if not thousands of years. This Chapter is concerned with providing a historical context to what is a subject with an extensive past. It is by no means a definitive timeline of the ‘story’ of competitive sport and Physical Education – that is not the intention; rather my aim here is to provide a rich historical background to the question posed in the thesis title. In that sense I have chosen periods of significant change in the conception and understanding of Physical Education to demonstrate how it is an area that has been constantly changed, rejected, legitimatised and isolated according to ideological trends and political whims.

There can be no doubt that the Ancient Greeks have had huge influence on almost every facet of life in western society. This is certainly the case when discussing competitive sport and Physical Education, where many of the attitudes and approaches we have today had their roots in Ancient Greece and were adopted by the public schools of the mid-1800’s, evolving to become part of the fabric of sport in contemporary society. One of the most obvious examples is the Olympics, which began in Greece, and was initially used as way of sustaining and promoting the social status quo, reinforcing the reigning classes ‘right to rule’ over those

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<sup>101</sup> See government policy documents; ‘Creating a sporting habit: A new youth strategy’ (DCMS, 2012), ‘Playing to Win: A new era for sport’ (DCMS, 2008) and ‘Game Plan: a strategy for delivering the government’s sport and physical activity objectives’ (DCMS/SEU, 2002)

not fortunate enough to be born into money or influence. Then, over time the Olympics began to evolve into a more meritocratic process<sup>102</sup> and competitive sport became a force for challenging social hierarchy and broadly democratic values, by way of, for example, selecting athletes to represent a city-state based on their abilities and not a social class. Developments such as these (and others) will be addressed and discussed in this section.

A further reason for starting this investigation into the nature and use of competitive Physical Education is that the Greek educational system highlights the contrasting value placed upon competition that is still found in modern political and educational disagreements today. The focus here compares the Spartan use of sport as means to prepare for war, against the Athenian model, which incorporated competitive sport and physical education into its wider educational programme. Through this dichotomy, these two states highlight competing attitudes towards the use of competitive sport and to physical education, and indicate how these opposing approaches exemplified more general schools of thought concerning the mind, the body and their uses in producing Greek citizens of the future. Namely, competitive sport as means to prepare for war (known as ‘*of the physical*’) versus competitive sport and Physical Education as an essential component of a rounded education that produces the ideal Greek citizen (*through the physical*).

Following this analysis of the way in which the Ancient Greeks can inform our current understanding of competition in physical education, I will turn my attention towards the Romans, who embraced the utilitarian uses of Physical Education to maintain fitness and produce efficient soldiers, but who also saw competitive sport as a form of (often brutal) entertainment for the masses.

I will then turn to the ‘Dark Ages’ as this was a period where the highly influential church viewed sport and games suspiciously – as it was linked to excessive drinking, gambling and general depravity – and whose negative views about the imperfection and imperfectability of the body led to the disintegration of any sort of bodily (physical) education.

This will then be followed by an exploration of the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation which were hugely influential in the eventual re-emergence of Physical

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<sup>102</sup> For a mixture of pragmatic and ethical reasons which will be discussed in detail later

Education, although for very different reasons. The Renaissance looked back to the Greek philosophies, considering Physical Education once again to be an important part of any individual's overall education. The Reformation's – more specifically the Church's – contribution was to allow Physical Education to be reconsidered again as an acceptable way of maintaining health, even if competitive activities were still considered morally problematic.

Finally, I consider the influence of the emerging Public Schools of England, and the doctrine of muscular Christianity, espoused by many school masters, intellectuals and writers at the time. During this time, competitive team sport became the dominant force behind a movement that undoubtedly changed the public school system, with many of its values becoming mythologized, and where, in its traditions and famous sporting metaphors, it still has an influence today.

### Education for Survival

This Chapter begins with a brief investigation of early civilisations, where early forms of physical education were necessary – through a strict hierarchy and emphasis on conformity – to ensure the survival of the tribe in what was a harsh and unforgiving existence.

In very early civilisations<sup>103</sup> Laker suggests it was survival, not education, that motivated people to learn, but that does not preclude the potential for an education<sup>104</sup> of sorts. Laker's phrase 'education for survival'<sup>105</sup> sums up the notion of an 'education' in which individuals and groups learnt and taught skills through the generations in order to survive in unsympathetic and often dangerous surroundings.

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<sup>103</sup> Early civilisations or societies (I will use these terms interchangeably over the course of this brief section) roughly defines a period of some 3000 years before the time of the Ancient Greeks. The term incorporates the early river civilizations of the Tigris, Euphrates and Nile as well as the Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, Assyrians, Hebrews and Persians. Historians of Physical Education (Ziegler, (1968); Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971) Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)) have indicated that - unlike the Ancient Greek period for example – there is far less research on these periods (historical or otherwise) to work with and consequently any account of this period can only be cursory

<sup>104</sup> By 'education' I mean this extremely early method of educating children had some elements of what we now consider the contemporary system of education in the UK

<sup>105</sup> Laker, (2000, p5)

With the ultimate and overarching aim of survival at the heart of everything early societies did, it is no surprise that most of this early ‘education’ was chiefly physical<sup>106</sup>. Learning focused on ensuring individual groups’ continued existence, but this was a very primitive form of skill-based Physical Education; summed up by Laker<sup>107</sup> as “... how to hunt, how to dance to please the gods, how to throw, how to run and how to run away!”. Through this we see early signs of competition as cooperation in order to progress individuals and strengthen the group, where children were indoctrinated through a series of initiations, in competition with each other, which introduced them to future, adult responsibilities within their groups<sup>108</sup>.

Conformity, group norms and values, rejection of individuality, social control through competitive initiation ensured the best chance of a group’s survival (often resulting in rejection of weaker members of the group) and were integral to early civilisation’s thinking<sup>109</sup>. These ancient conceptions appear to draw strong and rather startling parallels to modern practices taking place in Schools, Universities, sports clubs and professional sporting structures today<sup>110</sup>.

### The Ancient Greek Perspective

By the time of the Ancient Greeks, group survival was not the primary motivation in the education and development of young Greek citizens. Although, as this section will show, it did form part of an individual’s education to varying degrees, depending on what state within Greece they were born, there were now other intellectual, cultural and physical aspirations that required the attention of those in education.

### *The Ancient Olympics*

No summary of the history and progression of competitive sport (however brief) in the western world can ignore the enormous influence of the Olympics. That being said, the intention in this section is to pick up on some key themes and related observations that will

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<sup>106</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>107</sup> Laker, (2000, p5)

<sup>108</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>109</sup> Ziegler, (1968)

<sup>110</sup> For further detail and insight on early societies and competitive sport see Chapter 1, “The Competitive Impulse” in Baker, (1982)

highlight later sections, rather than make any attempt to cover the rich history of the Olympics in such a short piece of work.

It is generally regarded that the first Olympic Games took place in 776BC<sup>111</sup>, with other regional games added to it in time<sup>112</sup>. The ancient Olympics marked a time of celebration<sup>113</sup> intrinsically linked to the numerous gods they worshipped<sup>114</sup> where each Games was played out in honour of one of these gods. The Games, in this conception at least, lasted until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Romans turned the ‘spectacle’ of the event into something entirely different – ‘mere’ entertainment – before greater religious pressure from the increasingly influential Christians led to the eventual and complete demise of the ancient Games<sup>115</sup>.

Before the first Olympics, competitive sporting contests were almost exclusively tied to war, whether through competition involving essential battle skills, such as archery<sup>116</sup> or general links to leadership and ‘proving’ your worth to lead or to fight<sup>117</sup>. Sporting contests also provided a visible opportunity for leaders to explicitly ‘show’ why the gods had chosen them. In reality, these competitions were often little more than cleverly orchestrated performances, organised to ensure a ‘victory’ for the ruler or leader in front of an audience who (quite often) already *knew* the result. There were even occasions where the winning King was handed victory without even *participating*<sup>118</sup>. Such carefully contrived events were only ever meant to confirm what the rest of the army already knew; that their rulers had a divine right to lead and their skills and athletic prowess were assumed. As such, the leaders did not have the indignity of having to prove themselves to anyone, let alone their subordinates<sup>119</sup>.

There were some contests during this time that were closer in nature to the sort of fair competition we have come to expect in more modern times – referees, rules, prizes – but these contests were only really enjoyed (and participated in) by a small section of the Greek

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<sup>111</sup> Dombrowski, (2009); Reid, (2012)

<sup>112</sup> Ziegler, (1968); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Dombrowski, (2009); Reid, (2012)

<sup>113</sup> Laker (2000, p7) states that it is “...important to note the contribution made by the Greeks to the notion of sport as festival, the games being the most obvious example.”

<sup>114</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>116</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>117</sup> Reid, (2012)

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>119</sup> Harris, (1972)

population, namely the social elite<sup>120</sup>. Despite this, these later contests did represent a move away from a pre-destined showcase to something recognizably competitive and impartial in the sense that, as Reid states;

“...ones’ arête<sup>121</sup> is not presumed on the basis of social status or ancestry; rather, it must be publicly demonstrated through action – in war, in government, or even in athletic contests.”<sup>122</sup>

So the scene was beginning to be set for an overhaul of competitive sport and values it would attempt to express. The creation of the Ancient Olympics provided a platform for cultural exchange between the various disparate states and tribes within Greece that demanded a new type of contest that upheld the ideals of fairness, impartiality and democracy<sup>123</sup>. This decision ensured its own survival and was very much in keeping with the current thinking of the time that of finding ‘truth’ through the process of reasoning, questioning earlier beliefs based on myths and tales<sup>124 125</sup>.

With this context, it is easy to understand why fairness in competition was taken extremely seriously, with fouls during games punishable by appointed referees, who were allowed to physically beat those contestants caught cheating<sup>126 127</sup>. In contrast to the ‘performances’ of the past, these were serious events, run by referees who upheld previously agreed rules and who in turn were closely monitored to prevent collusion and possible corruption to cheat or sway results in any particular way<sup>128</sup>.

Such changes meant that the ‘performances’ mentioned previously were now a thing of the past, as states now turned to their best warriors and athletes to win contests that were run fairly and objectively by neutral referees. This development pointed to equality, and to a new meritocracy where those good enough to compete, were allowed to, irrespective of their

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<sup>120</sup> Dombrowski, (2009); Reid, (2012)

<sup>121</sup> Meaning ‘excellence’ or ‘virtue’ (Reid, 2012, p5)

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid* (p6)

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>124</sup> Dombrowski (2009) suggests that this was probably a pragmatic decision to begin with, in case cheating or unfairness incited acts of aggression between rival states.

<sup>125</sup> Bottomley, (1979)

<sup>126</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>127</sup> Anyone caught cheating may also be ordered to pay a fine, these monies would pay for statues of Zeus which would be erected in front of the stadium to remind them that competitions could not be bought (Reid, 2012)

<sup>128</sup> Miller, (2004)

position in society<sup>129</sup>. Equally, all participants were subject to the same punishments for cheating or rule infringements, again, regardless of whether they were from aristocratic roots or the lower classes<sup>130</sup>.

But this was no idealised sporting paradise; indeed, there were numerous issues that came with these social and political developments, issues which brought about mixed results and levels of success. The aristocracy had long enjoyed competitive sport before these changes took place, and did not like being challenged by those outside of their elite circles. They especially did not enjoy losing to those considered below them socially, and in front of a public audience too.<sup>131</sup> In an attempt to arrest their decline, they threw time and money into training and personal coaches in the hope that they could gain an advantage on fellow competitors who had no such luxury<sup>132</sup>. While the initial decision to have fair competition was brought in on religious grounds, in order to ‘ensure’ the most worthy winner and please the gods<sup>133</sup>, it had the altogether different effect of spectators and the wider public seeing men of different backgrounds and social class competing, with the result undecided, and sometimes with the victor coming from a lower class. Such spectacles led to an uncertainty about the prevailing hierarchy, an uncertainty that was all but confirmed once the upper classes began to spend considerable amounts of time training. As Reid notes, “People knew the difference between a victory earned with sweat and one earned with wealth.”<sup>134</sup>

Such opportunity – and the fame and wealth that went with success – inevitably led to some issues which seem to parallel some of the questions that surround modern sport today. Winners received free meals (sometimes for life), olive oil (worth a fortune at the time) and substantial sums of money<sup>135</sup>, which meant that what was already a serious competition was now a potentially life changing one too. It became the norm for athletes to train seriously, consider their diets and generally take a professional approach to ensure success in competitions where there was no prize or even recognition for coming second<sup>136</sup>. This led to the rapid rise of individualism, where the professional athlete was no longer concerned

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<sup>129</sup> It should be noted that women and slaves were not allowed to participate but nevertheless this was still considered to be democratic process. (Dombrowski, 2009)

<sup>130</sup> Miller, (2004)

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>132</sup> Dombrowski, (2009); Reid (2012)

<sup>133</sup> Reid (2012)

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, ( p8)

<sup>135</sup> The *chrematic* games (*chremata* is ancient Greek for money) for example, where athletes were paid if they won, and could become very rich if they could win a number of events (Miller, 2004)

<sup>136</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

simply with competing or representing his state<sup>137</sup> but the chance to earn money or win prizes. Concern was quickly raised among Greek intellectuals that perhaps there was now too much money, too much at stake, and that athletes had succumb to excessive amounts of bodily exercise and education with all balance and moderation lost<sup>138</sup>. The Greek ideal of *kalokagathia* – which combines bodily *and* moral or intellectual excellence – was seemingly thrown aside as athletes pursued their own self-interest and glorification<sup>139</sup>.

However, Dombrowski suggests that perhaps ancient athletics was simply part of a wider programme of life, a life of moderation (*sophrosyne*) between consideration for the body *and* consideration for the intellectual, where competitive spirit was used in both spheres of life to achieve *arête*<sup>140</sup>. Both Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum point as evidence of very early institutions that did just that; training that was both physical *and* mental<sup>141</sup>. This view is supported by the ancient Greek dualistic position<sup>142</sup> of *hylomorphism*, which views the corporeal body as fundamentally part of, and informed by, the mind/soul<sup>143</sup>. Seen in this way, the physical and the intellectual are not separate, but are considered equally important if an individual wishes attain *kalokagathia*. The emergence, then, of what we would recognise today as professional athletes was accepted by the ancient Greeks, but, it was done so with an expectation that any athlete would continue to educate themselves to ensure they achieved intellectual as well as physical excellence<sup>144</sup>. Those athletes who did not attempt to achieve *kalokagathia* were not held in quite the same reverence as those who did, with specialisation and overemphasis on training for competition leading to accusations of intellectual idleness<sup>145</sup>. But, with all that was now on offer to athletes that may not have had any other capacity to accumulate such vast amounts of wealth, there was no doubt many who could not live up to such lofty ideals.

Despite the Greek aspiration of *kalokagathia* for all athletes, the ancient games were eventually ended by the Romans, based on fears that Dombrowski describes as "...the

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<sup>137</sup> In an effort to win more events, states began to look outside of their own borders for potential athletes (regardless of their social class), and athletes would compete for the highest bidder (Reid, 2012)

<sup>138</sup> Miller, (2004)

<sup>139</sup> Dombrowski, (2009); Reid, (2012)

<sup>140</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>141</sup> Miller, (2004)

<sup>142</sup> I will discuss dualism in further detail in the next section.

<sup>143</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>144</sup> Miller, (2004); Reid, (2012)

<sup>145</sup> For example, Galen (the prominent physician and author) commented that athletes were often "...deficient in reasoning powers to the point where they only had the intellectual capacity of pigs..." (cited in Dombrowski, 2009, p27)

narcissism of athletes, the uselessness or gratuitousness of athletic activity, and so on.”<sup>146</sup> Despite this, the lasting legacy of the ancient Greek Olympics – even at this very early stage of human history – was already assured. Of course, this was just one the many aspects that ancient Greek culture has given the western world. In the next section the discussion turns to the opposing philosophical positions of physical education in ancient Greece, specifically in relation to the two schools of thought concerning the dualistic nature of the mind and body and what effect that had on the varying approaches to the use competitive sport and physical education in Greece.

### *Metaphysical Dualism*

The development and education of the body (much like the Ancient Olympics, which was described in the previous section) was the cause of great ideological and cultural friction amongst thinkers, politicians and educators in Ancient Greece<sup>147</sup> (perhaps even more so than in present day thinking). This friction was caused by two conflicting philosophical schools of thought concerning physical education and bodily development: naturalistic and anti-naturalistic.

The naturalistic view (with its chief proponent being Aristotle) called for a balance between intellectual *and* physical education, between mind *and* body as man existed in both domains. Therefore equal time and effort should be given to both to function properly<sup>148</sup>. The anti-naturalistic view, in contrast, views the body as a means to an end, a slave to the mind and to the intellectual process<sup>149</sup>. This conception sees physical education as a tool to maintain the body so it can efficiently serve the mind<sup>150</sup>. It is important to note that both schools gave a greater regard to the mind, but they were divided on the position of the body and consequently, its importance<sup>151</sup>. This dualistic theme is demonstrated by the two components in the Greek educational system, gymnastics (Physical Education) and academics, and carried throughout Greek philosophy and culture;

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<sup>146</sup> Dombrowski, (2009, p34)

<sup>147</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>148</sup> Fairs, (1968)

<sup>149</sup> Fairs, (1968)

<sup>150</sup> Laker, (2000)

<sup>151</sup> Arnold, (1968); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

“Each idea [naturalistic and anti-naturalistic] of Physical Education was the end product of a specific world view, or metaphysical position, and its corresponding cultural mentality (and) sociocultural system.”<sup>152</sup>

So although there was agreement that both the physical and the intellectual were important elements for development, there was little agreement on what that balance should look like. Similarly, the use of competitive sport within education was agreed, but supported for very different reasons, depending on its perceived use and value within those schools of thought in achieving their particular outcomes.

### *Balance vs. Excess*

Within Greece, two city-states came to best represent this division in motivation, philosophy, and outcome; Athens and Sparta. Both believed firmly in physical education and its ability to achieve particular outcomes, however, *what* they wanted to achieve and *how* they did it differed considerably, based on their different purposes in serving the country<sup>153</sup>.

Athens was the centre of most cultural and scientific activity in Greece. It concentrated on furthering knowledge and was influenced by famous philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as well as other well-known poets and writers. Sparta's purpose was quite different. Its role was to control and rule the country and protect the borders from Greece's enemies. As a consequence, Sparta's purpose was purely military, and this ethos was reflected in its education systems<sup>154</sup>. Whereas Athens followed the teaching and beliefs of Socrates and Plato and of a harmonious balance of training resulting in a holistic education<sup>155</sup> Sparta, in contrast, focused almost entirely on physical training for military fitness and other areas of education were barely recognised at all. Laker<sup>156</sup> calls these two conceptions “...‘*through* the physical’...” and “...‘*of* the physical’...”. This rather deftly describes the difference in purpose of the city-states and points to an ideological split that is still being discussed

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<sup>152</sup> Fairs, (1968, p14)

<sup>153</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>155</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>156</sup> Laker, (2000, p5)

today<sup>157</sup>. Through continued support for athletic competition, the Greeks as a whole sought to emulate the physical perfection of their gods<sup>158</sup> whom they viewed as ‘superhumans’<sup>159</sup> but from here the Athenian and Spartan approaches took contrasting paths.

In Athens, physical education was education *through* the physical, as Athenians sought a balance between body *and* mind. This approach was an integral part of an each individual’s overall education, and through it one could attain key virtues such as citizenship, leadership and bravery<sup>160</sup>. The Athenian approach can be summed by the concept of *arête* – “...striving for excellence or quality, coupled with the concept of one’s being as a unified whole”<sup>161</sup>. So, for the Athenian an unfit body was an indicator of a poor overall education.

In Sparta, this view was taken further; an unfit body in Sparta was considered negligent, and represented a potential danger to the state and its security<sup>162</sup>. In this sense Spartan education *of* the physical was closer to what we would consider military training today. Spartan life was brutal, representing a literal ‘survival of the fittest’ for all citizens from the day they were born<sup>163</sup>. Similar to some of the early societies’ motivations for ‘education’ the Spartan education was rooted in conformity, obedience and strong discipline<sup>164</sup>. Children were taken from home aged seven, trained rigorously until they were twenty years old, and then conscripted to military service until they were fifty<sup>165</sup>. Utilising various competitive sports<sup>166</sup>, Spartans were indoctrinated and moulded into warriors who revelled in the concept on *agon* – meaning intense competition and the pain one experiences from the desire to win<sup>167</sup>. It also included the excessive and obsessive drive for victory (by any means), being first in the

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<sup>157</sup> This split has now morphed into a ‘sports for sport’s sake’ (loosely like the Spartans, an intense focus on bodily, physical gains) versus ‘sport as an instrument for social change’ (incorporating sport and Physical Education into a wider social agenda) argument which has divided sports policy makers, academics and politicians alike in England for decades (see Houlihan and Green, 2006; Coalter, 2007; Collins, 2010) – all of which was discussed in the previous Chapter.

<sup>158</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>159</sup> Laker, (2000)

<sup>160</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p22

<sup>162</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971); Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>163</sup> For example, only the healthiest babies were allowed to live, any babies that showed any signs of illness or disability were taken to Mount Taygetus and left to die - Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Ancient Greece: The Greatest Show on Earth, (2013)

<sup>164</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>165</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Laker, (2000)

<sup>166</sup> All Spartan endeavours were centred on producing the strongest warrior and their choice of sports reflected this including (and this is not an exhaustive list); running, wrestling, fighting, boxing, horsemanship, archery and javelin throwing. See either; Mechikoff and Estes, (1993, p24), Phillips and Ropner, (2006) or Dombrowski, (2009) for more detail.

<sup>167</sup> Dombrowski, (2009) - For further insight on the concept of *agon* see Rosenberg, (2008)

gymnasium and on the playing field, and later, with much more deadly consequences, first on the battlefields. For the warriors of Sparta, defeat was simply inconceivable.

In contrast, children in Athens began education at the age of five, with a focus on physical education through music and dance, because it was believed dancing, in particular, forms a relationship between athletics and the education of the mind<sup>168</sup>. The Athenians believed that success – closely linked again with the concept of *arête* – in these disciplines was essential, and that *arête* was achievable without surrendering to ‘the sin’ of hubris and excess in the way that the Spartans did<sup>169</sup>. In the Republic, Plato points to an overemphasis on bodily education that can lead to a “...condition close to savagery...”<sup>170</sup> and that any athletic education should not simply *contribute* to what Dombrowski describes as “...idle vainglory...”<sup>171</sup> but should *enhance* the overall progress of each child.

Plato’s former student, Aristotle, also disagreed with the excessive concentration on developing children’s bodies for war and appealed to a ‘golden mean’, through achieving a moderating balance between excess and deficiency. This balance leads to virtuous action<sup>172</sup>. Interestingly, Plato also points out that although it is tempting to engross yourself purely in bodily exercise it is also as important that the opposite does not occur and one does not become so immersed in intellectual pursuits that exercise is forgotten, and the balance lost<sup>173</sup>. The difference between the Platonic and Aristotelian position on *why* this was important was, however, stark. Plato’s reasoning for the use physical education came from a position of distrust for the ‘evil’ body which contaminates and confuses the mind/soul, the ‘grossness’ of the body affecting the soul’s ability to access what Plato calls ‘wisdom’<sup>174175</sup>. Further to this, Plato believed that because our souls are ‘immortal’ it already had knowledge that it ‘forgot’ at birth, knowledge that ‘the enemy’ (the body) seeks to twist and change, misleading and confusing us (and our immortal souls) to what is real or accurate<sup>176</sup>. Physical Education became a way of controlling the body, of manipulating the body to the mind’s/soul’s will as

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<sup>168</sup> Dombrowski, (2009); Reid, (2012)

<sup>169</sup> Dombrowski, (2009)

<sup>170</sup> Plato, (1999, cited in Dombrowski, 2009, p62)

<sup>171</sup> Dombrowski, (2009, p63)

<sup>172</sup> Aristotle, (1999, cited in Reid, 2012, p14)

<sup>173</sup> Plato warns against leaning too far in the body’s favour in *The Republic* (1955)

<sup>174</sup> Jowett (1966, p62) cited in Mechikoff and Estes, (1993, p13)

<sup>175</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993, p13) state that ‘wisdom’ in its modern understanding would be more like ‘pure’ or ‘unadulterated’ knowledge

<sup>176</sup> Jowett (1966, cited in Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

much as was possible until death finally ‘liberates’ it from the confines of the body to understand ‘pure’ ‘wisdom’<sup>177</sup>. This is a highly detrimental position for physical education, but one that is taken up in various guises throughout history<sup>178</sup>.

Aristotle’s motivations drew faint comparisons to that of the early societies, as he saw physical education (along with education generally) as part of the state machinery, something to enable citizens to conform to work for the collective good<sup>179</sup>, civilising the individuals to become an active, useful part of structured society. Aristotle took a more moderate view concerning the dualistic nature of existence, believing that the two constituent parts were not in conflict with each other, in fact, he felt that the ‘rational soul’ needed to be educated because a healthy mind was reliant on the health of the body<sup>180</sup>. Seen in this way Aristotle believed that the two must work together to ensure both excelled, grew strong and enabled the individual to form part of the state, with physical education a constituent strand in the process of producing ideal Greek citizens<sup>181</sup>.

Whatever the difference between the two philosophers and their beliefs, both Plato and Aristotle believed that physical education was not something that could simply be added to an individual’s overall education to enhance and supplement what was already there. In their view, physical education was an essential component (albeit based on different reasoning) to the success of the individual, which by extension had ramifications for the state and the country. The outcome of an individual’s physical education had a direct result on the intellectual, spiritual and physical state of the nation as a whole – from military fitness to cultural nourishment – and as such, was embraced as a legitimate part of each citizen’s holistic education. The picture and balance was not always perfect but their methods, beliefs and philosophies concerning physical education, as well as their use of competition as part of that, would be felt throughout history to present day policy and ensure a continued Greek legacy for physical education.

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<sup>177</sup> Jowett (1966, cited in Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>178</sup> Most notably by the early Christian monks in the Dark Ages and later, in a slightly different form, and by the Muscular Christians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – both periods will be discussed in later sections.

<sup>179</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>180</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>181</sup> Ziegler (1968, p26) uses the term “all-around” citizen to describe the ‘ideal’ Athenian developed through this process.

This legacy is furthered by the deeply progressive effect the ancient Olympics had on how competitive sport was viewed, what it could achieve, and the values (sometimes unexpected) it produced. Although many of the decisions that resulted in a meritocratic system and the broadly democratic values that the Olympics is now synonymous with were made on religious and/or fairly pragmatic grounds, the outcome was so visible, so explicitly thought provoking – for the intellectual *and* the average spectator – that it had a profound effect on both those exposed to the ancient Games and to its ethos. Over a relatively short period of time, competition, through the ancient Olympics, had moved beyond minor contests inside state boundaries and inert performances laid on for Kings to ‘prove’ their worthiness to lead to something altogether more substantial. Olympic competition was a far more democratic process, allowed for a greater equality of opportunity and embraced fairness. This attitude has influenced the way in which competition has been viewed ever since, ensuring the ancient Greek legacy is still present in and out of sporting contests.

### Physical Education and the Romans

The Romans, while rejecting many of the practices of the Greeks<sup>182</sup>, developed the Aristotelian view of sport and Physical Education further. They took a much more pragmatic view to its value, one which (like the Greeks before them) drew comparisons with the need to ‘protect the group’ (in this case the Roman Empire), producing values such as conformity, obedience and loyalty, and creating individuals ready to fight for their country<sup>183</sup>. Indeed, the Romans’ fixed and highly practical view of Physical Education and its use was a very accurate reflection of their philosophy to most areas of life<sup>184</sup>.

As a result the Romans focused on the practical outcomes provided by Physical Education, and therefore were much closer to the Spartan ideal than the Athenian one. Consequently they did not focus on the aesthetic, academic life expounded by the Athenian Greeks; instead their focus on the use of Physical Education for the citizen and the soldier was far more

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<sup>182</sup> The Romans took a cynical view towards the Greeks aesthetic attitude regarding competitive sport and did not see the value of their approach to developing well rounded citizens through education. (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>184</sup> Ziegler, (1968); Laker, (2000)

utilitarian and functional. This was based on the Roman belief that, as a group of people, they had been selected by the Gods to rule<sup>185</sup>.

Military training, whilst not quite the all-encompassing, excessive experience the Spartans had to endure, was still rigorously harsh. The Romans produced a training programme designed to create well-organised, obedient warriors with little consideration to any holistic education<sup>186</sup>. By rejecting the Greek ethos they moved away from the athletic pursuits the Greeks enjoyed, focusing on team orientated competition which promoted extreme loyalty to the group and trust for your fellow soldier<sup>187</sup>. Competitive sport was quite explicitly blended with war as skills were learnt through competitions in horsemanship, archery and swordsmanship ensured men were ready to fight. This indoctrination process was reinforced through father and son as each generation was expected to prepare the next before entering the military process<sup>188</sup>.

Outside the army, there was no Physical Education as such, rather an emphasis upon ‘physical maintenance’; an acceptance that exercise was required but that it did not form an essential part of holistic education in the way the Greeks had embraced it<sup>189</sup>. In this sense it was the Roman attitude to take light exercise, if only to “work up a sweat before entering the waters”<sup>190</sup>, by playing ball games before utilising one of the many bathing facilities available. Physical activity, especially competitive physical activity was generally seen as excessive and distasteful and unnecessary<sup>191</sup>.

During this time, physical exercise became the preserve of wealthy citizens who could afford to spend time in health ‘clubs’ which – very much like our modern health facilities – contained, amongst other things, running tracks, swimming and bathing pools, restaurants, steam rooms and conference rooms, and the training of professional sportsmen<sup>192</sup>. These facilities were essentially places for minimal recreational and mostly for relaxation.

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<sup>185</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>186</sup> Baker, (1982)

<sup>187</sup> Athletics was considered by the Romans to be too individualistic and failed to promote “team unity” (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993, p42)

<sup>188</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>189</sup> Ziegler, (1968; Baker, (1982)

<sup>190</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993, p42)

<sup>191</sup> Ziegler, (1968); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>192</sup> Laker, (2000)

Increasingly, sport and physical activity was something that wealthy citizens were spectators *of* rather than participants *in*<sup>193</sup>.

Hedonism reached its peak at the various Roman games and festivals that were laid on and financed by the government, but these games bore little resemblance to the athletic contests that the Greeks so enjoyed but which were considered dull by the Romans<sup>194</sup>; indeed these games were devised for pure spectator gratification and amusement. Any education, physical or otherwise, was discarded, and where, in Greece, a form of meritocracy was visible in their Games (the average citizen could compete against men from different social and financial backgrounds)<sup>195</sup> the Romans considered sport mere entertainment for the masses<sup>196</sup>. This ‘entertainment’ was extraordinarily brutal<sup>197</sup>, and meant the deaths of many professional sportsmen, gladiators, slaves and criminals, and – unlike in Greece, where sporting events helped to promote Physical Education – did not facilitate a positive move towards any legitimate physical education<sup>198</sup>. The growth of Christianity at this time had a significant impact on these sporting spectacles, and by association physical education in general, which would be felt for years to come. While Greek practices were generally accepted, Roman sport was judged by Christian writers as barbaric and cruel<sup>199</sup> and, with Christians often the victims of such spectacles. It is therefore no surprise that the Church opposed such activities and this affected the way it was viewed in later years<sup>200</sup>.

Despite embracing much of the Spartan approach to Physical Education, the Romans always viewed the Greeks’ holistic educational approach to the average citizen with suspicion, instead focusing on bodily maintenance and using sport as a form of entertainment for the masses. In this scenario, sporting competitions (for those that were forced to take part) were cruel, where ‘winning’ meant surviving another day. For Roman spectators this was pure ‘entertainment’, with no educational merit and certainly none of the physical and intellectual foundations the Greeks believed in. Indeed, many of the issues that the Romans faced parallels with some of the current problems we face in society today; rising obesity levels,

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<sup>193</sup> Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>194</sup> Harris, (1972)

<sup>195</sup> See Chapter 1 “The Ancient Background” in Dombrowski, (2009) for greater detail

<sup>196</sup> Harris, (1972)

<sup>197</sup> It is interesting to note that Harris (1972) concluded that such barbaric entertainment was, by his definition, not sport at all

<sup>198</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>199</sup> Harris, (1972); Baker, 1982; Mechikoff and Estes (1993)

<sup>200</sup> Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

sport as entertainment and inactive lifestyles. The consequence of Roman excessiveness lent weight to the already cynical and increasingly influential view that Christians held: that Physical Education was not an appropriate use of the body.

### The 'Dark' Ages: The Deterioration of Physical Education

Physical Education during the Dark (Middle) Ages endured an unpredictable journey. Bound with the dualistic theology of the influential Christian religion, Physical Education was at first admired then a cause of great disagreement before eventually becoming a symbol of bodily sin.

Following the disintegration of the Roman Empire, society slowly receded back to individual kingdoms not dissimilar from the tribes of earlier times. Communities retreated behind the safety of heavily protected castles, forts and cities during this feudalistic time; mere survival became the driving force during a time of great unrest throughout Europe<sup>201</sup>. Amongst the turbulence the Catholic Church began to grow steadily in power, reach and influence throughout the former Roman Empire and beyond, and its view of Physical Education changed dramatically during this time<sup>202</sup>.

That is not say Physical Education was viewed negatively during this period, at least not initially<sup>203</sup>. Indeed, early Christian scholars had access to the works of Plato and Aristotle<sup>204</sup>, both of which had some influence on Christian thinking,<sup>205</sup> and while there was a small minority who sought to reconcile the 'unworthy' corporeal body carrying the soul through physical degradation<sup>206</sup>, the majority incorporated Greek philosophies into their thinking.

There was also initial agreement amongst the Scholastics that God, as the creator, would not produce human beings to be malevolent and, in Jesus, he [God] had created the perfect

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<sup>201</sup> Reynolds (1984)

<sup>202</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>203</sup> Although Mechikoff and Estes, (1993) point out that it is a common misconception amongst historians to make such a claim.

<sup>204</sup> Arguably the most prominent of these scholars was the theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, who was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy and at the forefront of the attempt to reconcile Christianity with Greek philosophy (Phillips and Ropner, 2006)

<sup>205</sup> Specifically discussions around the existence of the 'soul' (Mechikoff and Estes (1993)

<sup>206</sup> Bottomley, (1979)

being of mind, body and soul<sup>207</sup>. Seen in this way the body could be considered to be a worthy vessel incorporated as ‘one’, not subject to the dualistic view taken by the Greeks.

The scholastic theologians of the time believed in the Aristotelian position that the soul is in need of a body, a vessel in which to absorb knowledge, and that because God had created the body it was good and could not be a mechanism of evil<sup>208</sup>. Thus it was sensible to value Physical Education to ensure a holistic education of the individual. This view was not shared by the early Christian monks however; whose Platonic dualistic position put the body firmly in submission to the ‘immortal’ soul<sup>209</sup>. More than that, the monks saw the body as impure, created by God to punish man for their sins and a vessel in which to transport disease<sup>210</sup>. The consequence of such a position was inevitably devastating for Physical Education and its perceived value at the time and was exacerbated by the bubonic plague that swept through Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>211</sup>. For the monks, this pandemic all but confirmed their view of the body as fragile, unworthy and futile in the face of ascension to heaven, thus Physical Education and any sort of bodily endeavour was not only considered unnecessary, but a sinful temptation of the flesh<sup>212</sup>.

Despite the Church’s view, competitive sport and various ball games were very popular with both peasants and the aristocracy and, despite the Church’s best efforts to distance themselves from such activities, association was unavoidable. Arguably, the reason for this was that the only available opportunity in the week to indulge in any sort of leisure activity was immediately after church attendance on a Sunday, often on church grounds<sup>213</sup>. Another reason for the association was the recurrent holidays with which the church was inextricably tied to festivals such as May Day and Shrove Tuesday<sup>214</sup>. These days were supposed to be set aside for deep religious reflection, but to the peasants they represented rare opportunities for enjoyment and celebration with festivals and competitive games<sup>215</sup>. These ‘celebrations’ regularly turned into mass brawls, excessive gambling, damage to property and even death.

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<sup>207</sup> Bottomley, (1979)

<sup>208</sup> Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>209</sup> Bottomley, (1979)

<sup>210</sup> Laker, (2000)

<sup>211</sup> The bubonic plague, more commonly known as ‘the Black Death’ caused the deaths of 30-45% of the population of Britain and approximately 25-30 million people as it swept through Europe from Asia, mainly in the period 1347-51, but returning to Britain sporadically up to the late 1300’s (bbc.co.uk, 2011).

<sup>212</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971); Bottomley, (1979)

<sup>213</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>215</sup> Games which included very early versions of football, hockey and baseball (*Ibid*, p64)

Such deaths led the Church to become more involved with these festivals in order to gain greater control over what activities took place and how they were organised (though with limited success)<sup>216</sup>.

Competitive sport for the aristocracy was very much about ‘conspicuous consumption’; they wished to show off the best armour, horse, and weaponry<sup>217</sup> in order to parade one’s wealth to peers and peasants alike. It was also tied to the nobles’ duty to fight for the country and consequently became an integral part of the build-up, preparation and celebration of war<sup>218</sup>. Although eventually these tournaments evolved from rather barbaric events into something closer to the stereotypical image we have now of ‘swords and chivalry’, the Church was still moved to publicly denounce them and call for all tournaments of this nature to be stopped, but only after they felt they outlived their usefulness as a preparation for The Crusades<sup>219</sup>.

The Dark Ages were indeed a tumultuous time for society. Physical Education and competitive sport as a whole did not escape the consequences of the increasingly negative view of the body, as a mixture of societal regression, increased religious influence and poor living and working conditions for all, but the nobles’ attitude towards physical education nevertheless influenced the way in the body was perceived, at least for a short time.

Initial respect for the physical cultivation of the *whole* person, body *and* soul, based on Ancient Greek philosophic foundations were eventually swept away by Christian dogma. The view that saw the body as a tool for God to punish man through disease came to dominate; a belief that was reinforced by the bubonic plague which ravaged Europe and the Middle East sporadically for the next few hundred years. The Church’s view changed frequently to suit their own needs and agenda, sometimes turning a blind eye to certain activities (sporting or otherwise) if it helped their popularity or, supporting and then later opposing competitions, such as the Aristocratic Tournaments, if they did not directly support the Church’s aims. The most striking theme during this time however was the slow destruction of Physical Education as a valued practice. Competitive sport (as an integral part of the seasonal festivals) was viewed as part of the problem, since it was through sport that individuals were seen to debase

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<sup>216</sup> Laker, (2000)

<sup>217</sup> Reynolds, (1984)

<sup>218</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Mangan, (1992)

<sup>219</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

themselves and give in to bodily wants and needs. These practices supported the Church's negative view towards physical education and led to its further demise.

### The Renaissance and the Reformation: Intellectual and Religious Resurgence

The "Dark Ages" had an extremely negative effect on how Physical Education was utilised and viewed in England and Western Europe. This view, tied to rigorous religious doctrine, would eventually be rejected in the late Middle Ages by both the Church itself (in a period known as 'the Reformation') and by the intellectuals of the day (known as the 'Renaissance'). The reasons, motivations and goals of the two groups were very different but together they set about reinvigorating and refocusing discussions surrounding the body and its use, moving away from the destructive discourse of the previous period towards a more progressive view (in some respects) of competitive sport and Physical Education.

#### *The Renaissance*

The increasingly aggressive manner in which the Church conducted itself in the name of God began to be rejected by the intellectuals of the time, who were beginning to have a growing influence in society<sup>220</sup>. Central to this influence was a return to the Ancient Greek philosophers, (principally Plato and Aristotle) and a shift towards secular attitudes concerning bodily experiences and their importance<sup>221</sup>. As previously mentioned, the importance of the body, its purpose, and the experiences one felt had been diminished by the Church, rejected as part of a belief that the body corrupted the soul<sup>222</sup>. In contrast, Renaissance intellectuals brought positive ideas concerning the body back to the fore through their belief that bodily experiences held an important part in the progression and education of the individual<sup>223</sup>.

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<sup>220</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Laker, (2000); Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>221</sup> Ziegler, (1968)

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>223</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

Attempts to reconcile religious doctrine and classical philosophy by philosophers of the Renaissance was unsuccessful (as it had been previously<sup>224</sup>) and only highlighted huge ideological differences between the two that could not be bridged<sup>225</sup>. Chief among these differences were questions surrounding the body and its importance. The Renaissance scholars<sup>226</sup> held the body in high esteem, essential to the human experience; in contrast, the Church viewed the body as fragile and a weakening influence of the human spirit which drew the individual to ruinous excess that would ensure their damnation<sup>227</sup>. However, from this ideological conflict a separate group emerged from the scholars – the Humanists<sup>228</sup> – who rallied against traditional Church beliefs, actively promoting the classical Greek philosophy that body and soul work together to the betterment of both<sup>229</sup>. The strength of this opposition and its successful transition into popular thinking came about for two reasons; the first was that during this period in history, there was great conflict within the Church as different factions fought for control<sup>230</sup>, this conflict produced divisions that weakened its position and influence both in England and Continental Europe. The second reason was that many of the Humanist scholars had links to the Church in varying degrees, further undermining the Church's position concerning the body and the use of Physical Education to cultivate the individual<sup>231</sup>. For example, Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini advocated the use of extensive physical training for the individual through games that encouraged the well-being of the student while ensuring a certain military readiness, should he be called upon to defend Christendom from aggressors (in this case the Turks)<sup>232</sup>. Piccolomini would later become Pope Pius II<sup>233</sup>. Through Renaissance scholars such as Piccolomini, the philosophy of Humanism was brought the forefront, crystallised in the Humanist ideal of the 'universal man', an ideal that would have ramifications on education, and ensure a re-evaluation of Physical Education and competitive sport during the Renaissance.

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<sup>224</sup> The previously mentioned theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, along with the physician Moses Maimonides and St. Bonaventure had all attempted to combine the two systems of thought to varying degrees. (Bottomley, 1979; Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>225</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>226</sup> Such as Petrus Paulus Vergerius, Vittorino da Feltre, Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini, Pietro Pomponazzi, Baldassare Castiglione and Desderius Erasmus (some of these figures will be discussed further) (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>227</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>228</sup> I will discuss some of them individually in more detail later in the section.

<sup>229</sup> Ziegler, (1968)

<sup>230</sup> These divisions are best exemplified by the simultaneous election of three Popes in 1409 (Bronowski and Mazlish, 1960; cited in (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>231</sup> Ziegler, (1968); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>232</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>233</sup> Piccolomini reigned as Pope Pius II from 1458 to 1464 ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com), 2014)

The Humanist concept of the ‘universal man’ was the idea that, for man to flourish and progress, he must take an interest in all aspects of life, cultural, academic and sporting<sup>234</sup>. As a consequence Physical Education enjoyed a resurgence as competitive sports, games and forms of martial arts were incorporated into this new holistic education that, by the late Middle Ages was (to an extent), accepted by the Church<sup>235</sup>. However, there were subtle differences in how Physical Education was employed by various Humanist educators, some of whom were key figures during the periods of the Reformation and the Renaissance, or in some cases, both. These figures played an important part in shaping the place of Physical Education within education as a whole during this period.

As was the case in previous periods, the use of Physical Education and its potential outcomes created an ideological divide amongst the Humanist intellectuals as to how best to use Physical Education, and where its value lay<sup>236</sup>. Just as in Ancient Greece, some scholars followed the Athenian ethos, while others deployed Physical Education in a way much closer in spirit to that of the Spartans<sup>237</sup>. Petrus Paulus Vergerius, an Italian humanist, was heavily influenced by Plato and the Spartan ideology<sup>238</sup>. Vergerius believed strongly that Physical Education should be used to prepare young men for military service and as such he drew almost exclusively on the Spartan development programme, attempting to adapt it for more modern military activities. Competitive team sports were cast aside in favour of individual pursuits such as swimming and riding, with a focus on mastering the use of weapons<sup>239</sup>. Vergerius was not completely consumed by all things Spartan, and clearly influenced by Plato, ensured that the Spartan-style training was not the only element of an individual’s education, by integrating it into a wider education that would enable children and young people to grow up into active citizens<sup>240</sup>.

Like Vergerius, another Italian humanist, Vittorino da Feltre taught the children of the Italian aristocracy<sup>241</sup>. However, da Feltre’s teaching was based upon the Athenian educational ethos, as opposed to the Spartan one. Da Feltre was also one of the few scholars to successfully

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<sup>234</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>235</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>236</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993); Laker, (2000); Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>237</sup> Calhoun, (1981)

<sup>238</sup> Laker, (2000)

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>240</sup> Ziegler, (1968)

<sup>241</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

marry Christian teaching and (in this case) the Greek (Athenian) model of Physical Education<sup>242</sup>. At his school he hoped to produce ‘universal’ men, capable of ruling since his charges were the sons of aristocracy. Da Feltre did not endorse a particularly competitive programme as part of his Physical Education structure, he did, however, insist on at least two hours of physical activity a day. This included competitive ball games, but focused mainly on riding, hiking and camping<sup>243244</sup> as well as mastering military skills such as archery<sup>245</sup>. All this was included in the education curriculum with Da Feltre living the type of life he expected of his pupils; having extensive knowledge of the subjects he taught, always attending church, eating well and exercising regularly<sup>246</sup>.

Da Feltre’s influence on European Physical Educators cannot be underestimated, as he is generally considered to be the first scholar to successfully mix religious beliefs, humanist values and the education of both body and mind. This ensured Physical Education was considered an integral element in creating the active citizen. Interestingly, Da Feltre seems to place little emphasis on any sort of overtly competitive activities, instead focusing on narrow, militarily relevant skills like archery and fencing. There was, no doubt, a certain amount of inherent competition in some of the activities De Feltre supervised, such as any ball games he used, but the most intriguing aspect of his teaching was his use of what would be described today as ‘outdoor education’. De Feltre used camping, hiking and riding to ensure education of both body *and* mind, utilising both bodily elements to successfully negotiate all the obstacles that nature can pose. This approach undoubtedly produced a more favourable response from religious leaders who could not draw the same ‘impure’ connotations to these activities as they had with competitive sports.

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>243</sup> Indeed, Laker, (2000) points out that these outdoor activities and its accompanying educational philosophy can be seen in the ‘outward bound’ camps that take place around the world today.

<sup>244</sup> There is also a clear lineage from these outdoor, survival centred activities that incorporated learning, understanding and respect of one’s natural surroundings and the ‘forest schools’ that many Primary schools in England have set up in the past decade.

<sup>245</sup> Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>246</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

### *The Reformation*

By the late Middle Ages, the Church – in the absence of any other authority during this feudalistic time – now controlled and influenced almost every facet of secular life<sup>247</sup>. Central to this control was the assurance of everlasting happiness in heaven should the individual choose to follow the path laid out by the church, and the threat of eternal damnation in hell should this path be ignored or refuted<sup>248</sup>. The Catholic Church by this time had arguably become motivated almost entirely by greed and power<sup>249</sup>, draining church goers of what little money or valuables they had through various methods, always with the promise of a place in heaven<sup>250</sup>. These demands, coupled with the increasing dominance of the Church in everyday life was met with internal condemnation from many influential religious figures, some of whom would lead the Church to the Reformation and significant ideological change, change that would reshape the role of Physical Education in society.

One such figure, Martin Luther, was openly critical of the selling of indulgences and rejected the idea of ‘predestination’<sup>251</sup> believing it was instead important to educate and place responsibility on the individual (rather than God) to live a life that might ensure their place in heaven<sup>252</sup>; a move which effectively eliminated the church as the ‘broker’ between this world and the next. Luther also rejected religious attitudes that described the body as ‘unworthy’ to host the soul and the bodily self-discipline that went with it, and actively encouraged Physical Education as part of an individual’s overall education<sup>253</sup>. Indeed, his motives appear to use Physical Education to control children through *education-as-distraction*<sup>254</sup> and also – as children grow into adults – to ensure good habits, such as improving health and perhaps use competitive games as a form of catharsis<sup>255</sup>. Citing wrestling and fencing as examples, Luther advocated these activities as ways in which the individual could participate competitively in exercise and avoid deteriorating back to the sort of wild, often dangerous seasonal festival

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<sup>247</sup> Calhoun, (1981)

<sup>248</sup> Bottomley, (1979)

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>250</sup> These methods included *tithes*, a form of tax, one tenth of an individual’s yearly earnings or produce (oxforddictionaries.com, 2013) and *indulgences*, which, during the Reformation, were ‘sold’ by priests during the act of confession, placing the soul in a state of grace which would allow the individual acceptance into heaven in return for money (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993).

<sup>251</sup> The belief that God alone destined some to heaven and some to hell (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993).

<sup>252</sup> Phillips and Ropner, (2006)

<sup>253</sup> Van Dalen and Bennet, (1971)

<sup>254</sup> Along with reading, but also through music and dancing (Gerber, 1971)

<sup>255</sup> A similar approach was taken in Aristotle’s teaching of ‘good habits’ in an attempt acquire ‘moral excellence’ or virtue (Aristotle, 2002)

sports (which included excessive drinking, vulgarity, gambling and even rioting) of the past<sup>256</sup>. Luther also points to the benefits of such activity for the health of not only the mind and soul, but, crucially for the body too<sup>257</sup>. In a clear rejection of the Catholic church's view during the Middle Ages - that the body was impure (a 'punishment' from God) - Luther brought the question of 'the body' back into focus, forcing the church and its followers to reconsider Physical Education as part of a Christian education and relaxing the sceptical view of competitive games and sports in the process.

Another highly influential figure during this period was the theologian and pastor John Calvin, who shared Luther's belief that an individual's destination after life lay with them and not the church, but that is where the similarities finish. Calvin's position was that God produced people who were sinners<sup>258</sup> which meant that each individual would have to work hard to find God's favour and be allowed into heaven. As result of this belief Calvin thought that time on this earth was precious, with every day an opportunity to 'prove' to God that you were worthy of acceptance<sup>259</sup>. For Physical Education, and sport participation more widely, this position was profound because it meant what was regarded as a 'good' use of time were activities such as working and praying, and participating in these activities ensured you were destined to be accepted into heaven<sup>260</sup>. By contrast those who did not use their time wisely and indulged in playing competitive sport and games<sup>261</sup> would ultimately be turned away from faith and religious teaching<sup>262</sup>. In this respect Calvin returned to earlier beliefs that the body should be neglected, with the spirit (soul) the only thing in need of nourishment. The only value the body had was that it was an inseparable part of the process by which each individual could persuade God whether they had done enough 'good' work to be accepted into heaven<sup>263</sup>.

The educators in England during this time – within public schools at least – were deeply influenced by Lutheran and Calvinistic thinking. But there were those who were tied to the monarchy, which rejected this thinking and looked to the intellectuals of the Renaissance (in

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<sup>256</sup> Taken from Eby, (1942, cited in Mechikoff and Estes, 1993).

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>258</sup> Calvin followed the belief of 'predestination' as described in footnote 99

<sup>259</sup> Gerber, (1971)

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>261</sup> Which were considered to be in the same category as sex, drinking and gambling, (*Ibid*)

<sup>262</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>263</sup> Gerber, (1971); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

particular the Italian Humanists) and to the Ancient Greeks to inform their views<sup>264</sup>. Two such scholars were Thomas Elyot and Roger Ascham, who embraced the concept of the humanistic ideal of the 'universal man' and transposed it onto the expectations of what it meant to be an English 'gentleman'<sup>265</sup>. These expectations included understanding Greek and Latin, as well as other more modern languages, also included was reading and writing poetry, music and philosophy and an appreciation of the sciences; all skills which would ensure the individual could serve his country well<sup>266</sup>. Crucially, the liberal education advocated here included Physical Education; indeed, Physical Education ensured that all the other components of a gentleman's education was fully utilised<sup>267</sup>. There was a clear lineage to the sports promoted by the Greeks such as wrestling, running and swimming, and even fighting and dancing was supported. However some competitive sports, such as the early forms of football, were thought to be far too physical, and thus damaging to both body and mind, while dancing (in thinking clearly influenced by Calvin) should be used carefully, so as not to lead to sinful behaviours<sup>268</sup>. While competitive activities and humanistic attitudes were beginning to find their way into school life, it was only really the nobility who enjoyed such developments. Nevertheless, this period laid the foundations for more 'enlightened' thinking later on.

Although the end of the 'Dark Ages' saw the value of physical education at its lowest, it was a culmination of factors that brought it back into acceptance from both intellectual scholars and the Church. The bubonic plague, the Reformation and the eventual spread of Renaissance thinking from Italy towards Northern Europe led to a significant change in the way that the body and its development through physical education, was viewed.

The ramifications of the Reformation would be felt for hundreds of years. One of the effects was that it enabled the individual to hold a degree of control over their own spiritual destiny. This change meant that the Church was no longer the gatekeeper to the next life but instead became a guide in this one. With education back into the frame, Physical Education became a

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<sup>264</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>265</sup> For Elyot the ideal example of the English gentleman was Sir Walter Raleigh, skilled in many disciplines, as far ranging as business, the military, poetry and sailing (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>266</sup> Ziegler, (1968)

<sup>267</sup> Ascham in particular felt strongly that recreational time helped to rest and rejuvenate the mind and body (McIntosh, (1979); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>268</sup> Elyot did not consider the early forms of football to be 'proper' for a gentleman to play, indicating his concern was based on the physical nature of the sport and the damage it did to participants physically and emotionally. Dancing while acceptable was still viewed with cynicism because of its (according to Elyot) continued sexual connotations. (Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

consideration again and - especially in the Lutheran incarnation – the link between healthy mind and healthy body was rediscovered. However, the negative impact of a more ascetic attitude meant that Lutheran and, in particular, Calvinistic views almost completely rejected competitive sports and games. Luther at least saw some Greek-style activities as useful in maintaining health and preventing individuals going back to the wild and reckless sports of the past. In contrast, Calvin's view of competitive sport as a form of 'sin' (similar to gambling and drinking) meant that the practice of sports and physical training was further diminished.

Calvin's theology and his view of the body as a tool with which to labour (and pray) became accepted as the only way for an individual to be considered 'worthy' to enter heaven. Despite this, exposure to education and to some Physical Education (especially within Lutheran circles) for the previously uneducated working class ensured a small but significant reconsideration of the value of Physical Education, even if competitive activities were still struggling to be considered as anything other than violent, dangerous and lacking in moral value.

For the aristocracy, this period was just as transformational, although in a very different way to that of the lower classes. With European intellectuals looking back to the classic Greek philosophers for guidance the body was given value once more. It was considered integral in this life rather than the next, and developing the mortal body came to be viewed as an essential part of what makes us human and an ideal citizen. As a consequence Physical Education was once again back in the minds of educators and – whether by vaguely Athenian or Spartan means – was being used to educate the aristocracy and some of the upper class. Italian educators in particular were extremely progressive – running the type of schools that bear close resemblance in style and ethos to many present-day 'forest' schools and summer camps.

While Humanism influenced a few key figures in English education during the Reformation, it is interesting to note that Italian intellectuals – while not quite as damning as Calvin's school – viewed the more aggressively competitive sports and activities with cynicism. On both sides of the ideological divide there was agreement that overtly competitive activities would not nourish the individual – either intellectually or spiritually speaking – and would certainly not educate any individual in becoming a 'universal man'.

### Public Schools in England

By the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, the public school system began to gain prominence in England, with reputations for elite education based on a foundation of academic excellence and a devotion to religious teaching<sup>269</sup>. The negative view of the Church on the value of sport which had been so decisive during the Reformation was still present, but was now coupled with a belief from educationalists that many games (such as football) were considered ‘beneath’ the future leaders of the country<sup>270</sup>.

Initially, competitive games were considered to have no educational merit as far as most school masters were concerned, and while games did take place during school hours, these activities were normally run by the pupils themselves and went ignored by staff unless they got too violent and needed intervention<sup>271</sup><sup>272</sup>. Some school masters went further and vigorously opposed these activities, endeavouring to ban them, but such acts were not popular with pupils (or some teachers either, who were often quite involved in the games themselves)<sup>273</sup>. Competitive games during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were at best tolerated for their cathartic and diversionary properties, at worst they were continued to be labelled as ‘dangerous’ and violent (sometimes quite legitimately) to an individual’s education, and that that time should be spent on intellectual and spiritual nourishment.

Despite rejection from school masters, many games, both in and out of school, continued to gain popularity rapidly during the mid-1800s, and were often tied to some school specific ritual or initiation that took place each term or year<sup>274</sup>. Across the country, the various games particular to each school or area became increasingly unruly and violent, and often resulted in serious injury and sometimes even death<sup>275</sup>. These ‘games’ (often no more than a thinly-

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<sup>269</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>270</sup> For example, Samuel Butler, the Head of Shrewsbury School in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, was quoted as saying that football was “...more fit for farm boys and labourers than for young gentlemen...” (Holt, 1989, p75). Although even he had accede to popular demand and provide the school with a football pitch eventually. (Holt, 1989)

<sup>271</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Mangan, (2000)

<sup>272</sup> Early forms of football were very violent and pupils were quite often badly injured (Holt, 1989)

<sup>273</sup> A variation of football called ‘the wall game’ was banned at Winchester school during most of the 1820’s and 30’s due to the “...divisions and brutality it encouraged amongst the boys...” (Holt, 1989,p77)

<sup>274</sup> McIntosh, (1979); (Holt, 1989)

<sup>275</sup> Take the case of the son of Lord Shaftesbury, who, in 1825, was killed in an arranged fight with another boy which lasted two and half hours (Chandos, 1984, p77)

veiled excuse for a mass brawl) increasingly took place outside of school confines and often involved local gangs of manual workers. It gave pupils a platform and opportunity to show their true ‘character’ in the face of adversity and gain the respect of their classmates<sup>276</sup>. In an attempt to control this activity by the pupils, punishments within schools became more severe. This often resulted in rebellion by packs of pupils against their masters, with Army troops called in to control and restrain them<sup>277</sup>. Such violent scenes were not restricted to schools or towns either, with ‘fox-hunting’ (where boys played the parts of the ‘hounds’ and the ‘fox’) a regular occurrence in rural areas<sup>278</sup>. ‘Duck’ and ‘boar’ hunting (the ‘boar’ was nothing more than an ordinary pig) were also ways in which pupils could test themselves<sup>279</sup> and prove their worth within their school peer groups.

By the middle of century it had become clear to schools around the country that such violence, unruliness and wilful destruction could no longer be tolerated, and that the solution wasn’t to simply increase the (already) harsh discipline doled out, as this merely seemed to increase the pupils’ rebellious attitude.

### *The Rise of ‘Athleticism’*

A new direction, a new strategy was needed to tackle a disciplinary problem that had, at one point or another, overwhelmed many of the school master’s in public schools across England. At Rugby school, under the charge of Thomas Arnold (and more specifically the masters he had employed) a radical new approach of what would later be called ‘athleticism’ would be adopted<sup>280</sup>. Rather than prohibit the pupils’ use of competitive games and sports, they would be adopted and integrated as part of the school’s curriculum<sup>281</sup>. In contrast to the previous historical conceptions of games as an instigator in bringing out all that was negative in an individual, school masters began to see the potential to teach values such as co-operation, discipline and the ability for an individual to work with others towards a combined outcome as a team<sup>282</sup>, an approach not dissimilar from that of the Greeks. It also began to shift power back to the school masters by providing a structure in which pupils would be picked to

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<sup>276</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>277</sup> Chandos, (1984)

<sup>278</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>280</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>281</sup> Mangan, (1981)

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*

perform certain duties or tasks, which included giving older pupils the power to discipline others if they saw fit<sup>283</sup>. By embracing games and sports, and embedding them into the curriculum, manipulating their use and conception, Arnold and his staff had successfully found a tangible way to reform, discipline and imbue their moral code into their pupils through competitive sport.

By the 1850s, aided and abetted by figures such as G. E. L. Cotton (a former master at Rugby under Arnold, who then became head of Marlborough), the concept of ‘athleticism’ had begun to find its way into public schools across the country<sup>284</sup>. Organised sports clubs and games were now not only the norm in most schools, they were beginning to take over the school day. As Holt describes;

“Every moment had to be filled with useful or energetic activity and there was a timetable that showed exactly how time was to be spent. There were compulsory games every day. Even the school uniform, with its open shirts and long shorts looked like a football strip...”<sup>285</sup>

Such an enthusiastic approach was now typical and had so rapidly taken over public school education that organised sport was no longer just a way to impose moral teaching and discipline upon its pupils, it had morphed into a distinctive process all of its own, controlling the daily lives of pupils and teachers alike with little to no opposition from educators<sup>286</sup>. Arnold, who had inadvertently started the move towards ‘athleticism’, was now concerned that there was an over reliance on competitive sport, that it had taken over the curriculum and the lives of both pupils and staff. But by this time, Arnold was in the minority, as the next generation of educators’ fully embraced athleticism and its increasingly complicated hierarchy of codes and structures<sup>287</sup>. Intellectual learning, which had centred on academic subjects, began to lose its prominence in the school day as more and more competitive sport was incorporated into the curriculum<sup>288</sup>. Schools sought to move or integrate large playing

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<sup>283</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>285</sup> Holt, (1989, p81)

<sup>286</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Mangan, (1981)

<sup>287</sup> Those who excelled at sport were rewarded via a complicated system which ranked pupils (mainly) according to their sporting achievements – such rewards included being allowed to use a walking cane or wearing a type of hat, and could be as intricate and subtle as earning ‘the right’ to wear a different type of tie or show more (or less) of your shirt cuff. (Holt, 1989)

<sup>288</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

fields into their grounds to ensure their teams had the best facilities and crucially, could appeal to parents who were often more concerned with impressive sporting surroundings than academic excellence<sup>289</sup>. Many grammar schools in England soon followed suit, taking the same approach to Physical Education as the public schools, imitating the culture of athleticism which included, amongst other things, a clear hierarchy amongst the pupils, sorting the boys into separate teams and ‘houses’, assigning colours and songs, and generally replicating the new public school ethos of Physical Education<sup>290</sup>. Such an approach from both public and grammar schools made the transition to higher education all the more easier, as demands focused much more on the sporting than the academic<sup>291</sup>. Pupils coming from these schools were consequently well prepared for the type of culture that took place within University (via the College and House system) and between Universities (which had fierce rivalries) across the country<sup>292</sup>. This ensured that these institutions played an important part in the continuing formalisation of organised competitive sport<sup>293</sup>.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, competitive sport as part of school Physical Education had recovered to find its place not only in education as a whole, but as something vital to the cultural identity of each school and anyone exposed to it. Public school Physical Education had moved from a necessary evil to an essential part of each school’s character and makeup, with intra, inter and national competitions populating the school calendar. In a stark reversal to religious beliefs which fostered the assumption that to ‘play’ was a waste of time, the *opposite* was now true with the school system; pupils were expected to be consumed by sport and all the rites and rituals that went with it and to rally against this expectation was to be labelled idle.

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<sup>289</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>290</sup> Many heads of the most influential grammar schools at the time were previously master’s in public schools  
(*Ibid*)

<sup>291</sup> Mangan, (1981)

<sup>292</sup> Indeed, Universities began to improve their facilities in a similar vein to that of the public schools (Mangan, 2000)

<sup>293</sup> In the 1820’s there were only really rowing and cricket events between Universities to speak of – but by the 1890’s a whole host of sports including rugby, football and athletics were being played. Along with the continued usage in public schools, this allowed many sports to given common rules and regulations (Holt, 1989)

*Muscular Christianity: Redefining Masculinity*

Coupled with the emergence of athleticism, the doctrine of ‘Muscular Christianity’ was the unerring force behind the rapid change of fortune for Physical Education and, in particular, for competitive team sports during the period of the emerging public school system. Established in England by Bishop Fraser and writers Charles Kingsley, Charles Wordsworth and Thomas Hughes<sup>294</sup>, muscular Christianity – contrary to previous Christian beliefs – promoted the body, ‘manliness’ and physical strength, and saw the means to attain it, the effort and discipline it took, as an attempt to become a good Christian based on the premise that strength and physicality were intrinsically good<sup>295</sup>. Competitive sports provided teachers with a highly visible, relatable opportunity to express this new moral education to impressionable pupils. Competitive sporting contests were seen as the ultimate expression of muscular Christianity, bodily strength glorified, and was understood as a reflection of the natural order of things. Any weakness, any rejection of these values were seen as a moral rejection or weakness in the individual, a sign that ‘feminine virtues’ had crept in<sup>296297</sup>.

The conception of Physical Education within this ‘muscular Christianity’ framework could be viewed as a reaction to the perception of unruly, ‘unchristian’ behaviours that characterised pupils in the early stages of the public school system. While this is true to an extent, this explanation is far too simplistic and would not tell the complete story of the development of muscular Christianity and why it had such an influence on Physical Education and education in general.

In the century before this period of great change in England during the 1800s, many influential philosophers and educators in mainland Europe were already beginning to see the moral educational value of competitive sport and its use in shaping the morality of the individual as they develop<sup>298</sup>. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was at the forefront of this change in attitude, who saw the potential of exercise as a mechanism in which to impart moral development, to “make it [the body] strong and healthy in order to

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<sup>294</sup> Thomas Hughes wrote the highly influential *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, which is based mainly on the authors experiences at Rugby during the 1830’s (Ziegler, 1968)

<sup>295</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>296</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>297</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>298</sup> This took place principally in Germany and France (McIntosh, 1979)

make him [man] good and wise”<sup>299</sup>. Rousseau believed that exercise would not ‘brutalise’ the mind, far from it, exercise could be the catalyst to understand reason at an early age and be a great deal more useful than anything learnt in the classroom<sup>300</sup>. Furthermore, he felt that such activity and its moral teaching, development and outcomes plugged a gap in the schooling of the time<sup>301</sup>. One of Physical Education’s chief qualities, according to Rousseau (and echoing Luther’s beliefs concerning the application of Physical Education), was the ability to delay or distract the individual from the temptation of ‘impure’ thoughts and acts, and therefore Rousseau advocated vigorous exercise (he gives the example of hunting) as a counterbalance to any sexual inclinations one might have<sup>302</sup>.

This conception was shared in Germany<sup>303</sup> and later began to influence educators in England in the early 1800s. It was also of interest to the British Government, who noted Physical Education’s apparent ability to empower students with confidence that could be transplanted from playing field to classroom. They also saw that the moral influence of the teacher could be extended across other areas of a pupil’s life<sup>304</sup>. It was around this time that the perceived lack of discipline and lack of moral education was reaching its peak across the public schools of the country. The two strands of what was to be termed later as ‘muscular Christianity’ were borne out of this European influence and the aspiration of the educators of the time to reform the system, by (1) using the ethical elements of competitive sport, principally in team sports, to educate and then (2) to transfer that training of moral and ethical codes to the outside, adult world<sup>305</sup>.

Initially, Thomas Arnold took the slightly more cynical route as directed by Rousseau. Like Rousseau, Arnold saw competitive sport as a distractive mechanism to control pupils who had previously invaded the countryside with their sports in an unruly manner. Therefore he saw controlled and organised school sport as a small strand of his overall attempt to reform his pupils, the bulk of which would take place in the classroom<sup>306</sup>. By the mid-1800s, G.E. L.

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<sup>299</sup> Rousseau, (1762:1974, p84)

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>301</sup> Ziegler, (1968)

<sup>302</sup> Rousseau, (1762)

<sup>303</sup> The German educator GutsMuths, for example, saw physical fitness as a requirement in achieving moral goodness (Ziegler, 1968)

<sup>304</sup> Committee of Council on Education, 1839-40, cited in McIntosh, 1968)

<sup>305</sup> This new ethos was expressed quite explicitly in sporting phrases used to denounce (‘to hit below the belt’) or approve (‘playing with a straight bat’) moral behaviours. (McIntosh, 1979)

<sup>306</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Holt, (1989)

Cotton, at Marlborough, was making explicit the apparent link between competitive team games and moral strength<sup>307</sup>. This view was further reinforced by the writing of Kingsley and Hughes, which gained popularity during this time, ensuring the muscular Christian ideals of manliness, physical competence and their supposed intrinsic links to moral goodness found a much wider audience<sup>308</sup>. Such views were given legitimacy by the Royal Commissions set up in the 1860s to inspect the Public Schools: the Clarendon Commission in 1864 for example, praised the schools in their ability to teach pupils “to govern others and to control themselves”<sup>309</sup> through the use of exercise and sport.

*‘Manliness’, the Empire and ‘Excessive Athleticism’*

Central to any understanding of ‘athleticism’ and of muscular Christianity itself was the term ‘manliness’ and the way in which the public school system had come to use this word to describe, display and attach value – in particular, moral value – to it. Competitive sports were essential to ensuring that the ‘right’ sort of manliness was extolled to each schools’ pupils – a pure, *muscular Christian* manliness that teachers and parents would demand, to make sure each boy would grow up into a man that was healthy of body and pure of thought<sup>310</sup>. The Victorian example of this ideal was often William Wordsworth, whose combination of intellectual and bodily excellence was most appealing to Victorians at the time<sup>311</sup>.

Much in the way Rousseau had intended, competitive sports and games would be used to prevent young boys from succumbing to their adolescent urges. But more than that, this new ‘manliness’ would redefine what it meant to be the ‘ideal’ physical and moral man<sup>312</sup>, in deliberate opposition to any rampant male sexuality, an overt attempt to control the inevitable progression to adulthood.

Essential to this process was the further demonization of homosexuals<sup>313</sup>. Through a good education, boys would grow up to become men who were not controlled by their primitive

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<sup>307</sup> Mangan, (1981)

<sup>308</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>309</sup> Mangan, (1984; cited in Holt, 1989, p76)

<sup>310</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>311</sup> Haley (1978, p62; cited in Holt, 1989, p89)

<sup>312</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>313</sup> Holt, (1989)

sexual urges, but would not be machines either. Through strong competitive sports (amongst other things) these boys would learn leadership, gain confidence and be proactive, and become the perfect foil for the vulnerable, sensitive woman he would one day marry<sup>314</sup>. The law which made homosexuality a crime in 1885 all but confirmed what was considered the polar opposite of this new manliness, both from religious and legal points of view<sup>315</sup>. So clear gender definitions were created in the public school system and outside to reinforce all things manly, Christian, and athletic: the ‘ideal’ man, a strong, brave leader and provider for his family and his wife who would be the carer of his home and family<sup>316</sup>. The homosexual was a ‘warning’ of what might happen if one failed to take part in healthy competitive activity; they were characterised as feminine, ‘unnatural’, and a deviant that was considered the complete antithesis of the conception of ‘pure’ manliness<sup>317</sup>.

Such misguided considerations were far from the everyday reality within in many schools, where pupils and sometimes teachers were involved in just the sort of activity that these reforms were meant to prevent<sup>318</sup>. Still, healthy competitive sports were seen as one the most effective ways in which to tackle such a problem. This again mirrored Rousseau in that any sexual thought would eventually lead to disaster, with a good game of rugby the key to keeping boys on the path to manly virtue.

These aspirations became mixed with broadly Darwinian theories<sup>319</sup> concerning ‘the survival of the fittest’ which were translated into rampant physicality and the sort of individualism which was seen as necessary to create future leaders in the ever-expanding Empire<sup>320</sup>. Competitive sports came to be seen as part of a rigorous, severe education<sup>321</sup> that would promote the muscular Christian ideal while producing strong, healthy men. That is not to say that the educators at the time were consumed with merely producing ‘winning’ pupils; ‘taking part’ and ‘doing one’s best’ regardless of the result, learning from failure or defeat

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<sup>314</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>315</sup> Mangan, (1981); Holt, (1989)

<sup>316</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>317</sup> Holt (1989, p90) uses the famous legal trial between Oscar Wilde and the Marquis of Queensberry in 1894 to very effectively describe the contrast between what he describes as the supposed ideals of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ physicality in relation to manliness. The trial “...juxtaposed [Wilde’s] aestheticism with [the Marquis’] true manliness and sportsmanship...” (Holt, 1989, p90)

<sup>318</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Holt, (1989); Mangan, (2000)

<sup>319</sup> Darwin’s book concerning evolutionary theory, *On the Origin of Species*, was published in 1859.

<sup>320</sup> Mechikoff and Estes, (1993)

<sup>321</sup> Sport along with “...meagre rations and freezing dormitories...” (Holt, 1989, p94) would create a disdain for comfortable living.

was viewed just as favourably (if not more so) as the ‘winning’. Here the utility of success or failure, winning or losing, learning to improve and understand from each result, was held high in esteem, and lay at the heart of what fair, manly competition was all about, both in school and, eventually, in the workplace<sup>322</sup>.

This approach was gaining many admirers; Baron Pierre de Coubertin in particular took interest in the English public school system, and whether it could be applied in France, where concerns were being raised as to whether schools had become *too* focused on academic pursuits<sup>323</sup>. Within England itself the military applications and associations of Physical Education and its apparent value to the Empire – which had always been a feature in the various armed services – were being linked to educational reform brought in by muscular Christian educators<sup>324</sup>.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the utilitarian structures set up within schools, such as the prefect system, were used as an example where schools systems mirrored and prepared pupils for the military structures they would go into after school, from which they would oversee the Empire at home and abroad<sup>325</sup>. The required values that a good officer needed were also to be discovered and honed on the playing field, where competitive team games would weed out weaker competitors, those who led, those who followed, and those with the courage to sacrifice themselves for the good of their team or school. Seen in this context, competitive team sporting events bore all the hallmarks of a ‘war’, a pretend conflict that provided ample opportunity for development, while feeding into the idea that ‘real’ war was played out much as a sporting event, with fairness, sportsmanship and respect for the opposition<sup>326</sup>. In stark contrast to the realities of war, the contradiction between actual war and some sense of sportsmanship and ‘playing fair’ persisted long into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the moral link finally destroyed by the Second World War, the ‘total war’ that forced those in power to set aside any thoughts of muscular Christian idealism<sup>327</sup>.

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<sup>322</sup> Mangan, (1984); McIntosh (1979)

<sup>323</sup> De Coubertin, creator of the modern Olympics Games, visited Eton and Oxford on a number of occasions. (Holt, 1989; Mechikoff and Estes, 1993)

<sup>324</sup> Laker, (2000)

<sup>325</sup> Mangan, (1984)

<sup>326</sup> This was one of the reasons that Rugby often took precedence over Football, because educators believed the game required more courage and was much more physical. (Green, 1953; cited in Holt, 1989)

<sup>327</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

Long before that time, in the late 1800s, there were already those who felt that this new doctrine of athleticism created by muscular Christian educators had turned excessive, morphing from embracing a healthy competitive ethos to something altogether more aggressive<sup>328</sup>. This was aided by the ever growing number of governing bodies<sup>329</sup> which codified and formalised their sports. This increased structure for many sports added a new tone to what competitive sport had to offer<sup>330</sup>.

Attitudes to competitive sport and Physical Education had now come full circle within education. Whereas before, muscular Christian teaching with any association to sporting activities were seen firmly in a pejorative sense, strong backgrounds, facilities and honours in specific sports or sports events were now positively encouraged, and were seen a calling card to any young man (and his parents) who wanted to represent his school<sup>331</sup>. However, the increasing glorification and general obsession with competitive sport, the training and devotion it required of its young pupils coupled with expectations from educational institutions led to accusations of excessiveness<sup>332</sup>. Contrary to the virtues many educators believed the pupils would gain from such manly pursuits, some such as the novelist Wilkie Collins felt the opposite was true. Collins suggested that far from ‘playing fair’ – in accordance with the strong muscular Christian values each pupil had been taught – such teaching trained the pupil to “take every advantage of another man that his superior strength and superior cunning can suggest.”<sup>333</sup>. Later he suggests that wholesome Christian values are in fact replaced by a vicious competitiveness that leaves a man open to temptation of every kind, rendering him morally weak. In short, it leaves him;

“...at the mercy of all the worst instincts of his nature; and how surely, under those conditions, he must go down (gentleman as he is) step by step... from the beginning in ignorance to the end in crime.”<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Ziegler, (1968); McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>329</sup> For example, the Football Association (FA) was formed in 1863 ([www.fa.com](http://www.fa.com), 2013), the Rugby Football Union (RFU) in 1871 ([www.rfu.com](http://www.rfu.com), 2013), the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) in 1882 (Wigglesworth, 1992).

<sup>330</sup> Holt, (1989)

<sup>331</sup> Mangan, (1981)

<sup>332</sup> McIntosh, (1979); Holt, (1989); Mangan, (2000)

<sup>333</sup> Collins, (1902; cited in McIntosh, 1979, p31).

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid*

Such concerns were shared by the headmaster of Uppingham School, Edward Thring, who – despite being an outspoken supporter of competitive sport – felt compelled to speak out about the increasing fanaticism and danger of consuming oneself entirely in sport<sup>335</sup>. But once at University, such apprehensions were taken to a new level, where many chose their prospective College on the basis of their sporting prestige and history<sup>336</sup>. The ever greater time students spent with preparing, training and taking in part in sporting events increasingly dominated the academic year<sup>337</sup>. Thomas Hughes was moved to clarify the ideological position of a movement he had so potently described and vindicated in his earlier works with the next Tom Brown adventure: *Tom Brown at Oxford*. In it Hughes attempts to answer any critics concerned with increasing manly excesses induced by the muscular Christian ethos, explaining that boys those who might have followed that path are doing so only for themselves, for their own gratification and pleasure, whereas anyone following muscular Christian beliefs train so they might serve and protect others<sup>338</sup>. Failing that defence, many advocates of excessive athleticism felt that at its worst, playing a good game of rugby was still much more preferable to other activities that were infinitely more damaging to young minds. For them, it was better than a return to the days of boys running around the countryside unchecked outside of school bounds, or allowing a young adolescent any opportunity to take an interest in sex which would, as the Head of Eton, Edward Lyttleton put in a letter to *The Times*, inevitably lead to “the destruction of sanity and upright manliness.”<sup>339</sup>

This period was a highly influential stage in the development of Physical Education in England, and represented a completely new attitude towards competition, its perceived value and its use by the influencing powers in the country; namely the Church, the government and the educators working in the schools. It led to a paradigm shift which ensured Physical Education and competitive sports in this country would be viewed in its most positive light and seen as an integral part of an individual’s education, the legacy of which can still be seen today.

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<sup>335</sup> McIntosh, (1979), Mangan (1981), Holt, (1989)

<sup>336</sup> For example any pupils with a strong rowing pedigree were almost *expected* to go onto Oxford rather than Cambridge during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Wigglesworth, 1992)

<sup>337</sup> McIntosh, (1968)

<sup>338</sup> McIntosh, (1979)

<sup>339</sup> Holt, (1989, p92)

This was not a change that happened quickly however. Both the Church and many educators viewed the use of sport in schools with great suspicion despite, or perhaps because of its increasing appeal to pupils and teachers alike. Many of the old, traditional games – such as the ‘hunting’ games previously described – were often strongly tied to the traditions of a school. Many games were particular to each school and were not just played for the sake of something to do, but represented something much more meaningful; they became rites of passage that each boy must experience. The clever manipulation of the games and sports the pupils held dear, coupled with the use of newer sports which were used to replace the old, and had been selected quite specifically to ensure conformity and obedience and enable the teachers to slowly wrestle control back from their pupils. Educators rapidly moved beyond using competitive sport as mere distraction to using it as a mechanism to control those previously considered uncontrollable. In this respect, Physical Education and in particular, competitive team sports, were viewed as a moral tool that could be used to enforce Christian values in order to produce particular types of moral citizens.

Ultimately, the sentiments that muscular Christianity attempted to foster through competitive team sport in schools was an attempt to contribute towards the moral and ethical development of the individual. This model provided practitioners with an easily identifiable way of explaining and experiencing different situations and tests that inevitably take place during the course of a life. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century this aspiration became inextricably intertwined with other outcomes, such as nurturing patriotism, the inhibiting of adolescent instinct and, eventually becoming consumed in its own ideology, losing its force as it became excessive, to the detriment of anyone who did not conform to its very exacting principles. In particular this rigid ideology isolated, anyone whose sexual preference was not *explicitly* heterosexual, and anyone who did not love sport, ensuring such groups were either kept silent, ignored or demonised.

### Conclusion

Current conceptions of what we know to be competitive sport and Physical Education bear little resemblance to that of the early societies of the world. Contemporary society has no need to train for attack from predators, nor does it need to teach people how to kill. Despite this, and despite thousands of years of human evolution that seemingly distance modern civilisation from such archaic demands, there are clear parallels and comparisons that run

through this brief historical investigation, right up to present day. The most prominent of these is the use of competition to enforce conformity, which reaffirms social hierarchies within a family or group (team) and infuses them with trust and a clear understanding of roles. The Greeks used competition in much the same way, with the Spartans in particular finding competition useful in encouraging loyalty amongst their warriors. The Romans continued this approach, with an emphasis on structure and discipline which ensured dominance over their rivals. By the time of the public school system in England, such structures had arguably *increased* and grown even more pervasive, as more and more complicated social mechanisms were put in place by both pupils and teachers to ensure strong willed men ready to fight for 'the Empire'. Such an approach is not that far removed from current policy, albeit a very different type of 'battleground' in which to prepare young people for.

The Ancient Greeks are fundamental to any conversation concerning Physical Education, a civilisation that was progressive and at times, highly pragmatic. The split between Athens and Sparta resonates deeply with the approaches taken by recent governments in England to use competition for various means, and will be discussed in the next chapter. Despite these differences, the Greeks, through the Ancient Olympics, proved an extremely progressive conception, providing early examples of values such as fairness, equality and meritocracy, although quite often this was more by accident than design. The Romans too knew the power of 'the spectacle', sporting or otherwise. Their conception of competitive sport bore comparison with the views of the Thatcher-led Conservative government of the 1980s, where sport became 'leisure', with relatively little educational merit.

The Renaissance saw a return to Greek values, with Physical Education an integral part of ensuring an individual's holistic education and becoming an active citizen, bringing back a much more positive conception of the body. Such an approach, in particular the consideration that competitive sport might have a role to play in the wider education of the individual, has echoes of the policy pursued (initially at least) by the Labour government, a policy that also saw the educational potential of competition.

The use and value of competition, and the pervading attitude of policy makers, educators and academics saw the rise of the Public schools during the 1800s and their associated values has arguably had as much influence on English society and Governmental education policy as the

Olympics had on Greeks civilization centuries before. Many of the customs and traditions born and observed first in public and later in emerging grammar schools have grown into myths and duties so ingrained in modern day sport that we assume their roles essential, at the heart of what sport means to everyone, whether playing as an individual, for a team, representing a school or playing for a country. Common sporting phrases, metaphors and analogies that are tied up in the 'muscular Christian' ethos have found their way in to everyday language and parlance. This conception of sport and the associated metaphors that focus upon fair play and fairness can be seen to have had an influence far beyond sport itself.

Throughout this brief history of competition in Physical Education it is clear that it has been used in various ways and for various purposes or outcomes. What is also clear throughout history is that Physical Education has fought to find legitimacy from those in power with varying degrees of success. And as we have seen in the recent history of competition and Physical Education, the fluid conceptual nature of Physical Education in wider educational policy continues to the present day as many of the ideological battles fought over the provision of Physical Education in schools replicate those seen in previous centuries.

This overview demonstrates the shifting conceptions and the effect this has had on its perceived value as a subject. This in turn has ensured that Physical Education, as a legitimate educational tool, has been in an almost constant state of flux from its earliest conception to the present day. In an attempt to 'address' the issue of providing an appropriate conception, I will now turn my attention to considering a working conception of competition, investigating some current philosophical examples and the values (or lack of value as the case may be) they extol.

### **Chapter 3 - A Conception of ‘Competition’ in Sport and Physical Education**

As stated previously this Chapter will attempt to come to a ‘working’ conception of ‘competition’ so that it can be used as an anchor in the discussions to come. First, by discussing the roots of the word ‘competition’ itself, grounding initial discourse in various definitions that point towards other relevant concepts and ideas. What follows after that is an investigation into philosophical concepts and discussions that have been surrounding this topic previously, in particular looking at the positive and negative elements that have been associated with the intrinsic and consequential values of competition in sport. This investigation will, in turn, provide a platform from which I will synthesize a ‘new’ concept of competition, one which can be used as a means in which to champion virtue, well-being and the good life.

#### A Short Etymological Introduction to ‘Competition’

Before turning the discussion to the values of competition and the various, contrasting discussions surrounding its use in sport, let us first briefly explore the etymology of the word itself to ensure a strong footing from which to begin.

The word ‘competition’ comes from the Latin *competitionem* which, on Dombrowski’s interpretation;

“...points to two parties striving for the same object in a match meant to determine the relative excellence of the two parties.”<sup>340</sup>

He goes on to explain that the word is a compound of *petere* and *com* – which means to strive *with* rather than *against* – or perhaps, “...it means to *ask* with (e.g. whose athletic performance is better?), rather than *against*.”<sup>341</sup>. Thus, competition serves a classic philosophical mechanism, that of seeking ‘the truth’ while also suggesting that to have a contest in the first place, a competitive partner is required.

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<sup>340</sup> Dombrowski, (2009, p97)

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid*, (2009, p97, emphasis added)

Hyland comes to a very similar conclusion, stating that from the root word, we see competition as a way of;

“...questioning each other *together*, a striving *together* presumably so that each participant achieves a level of excellence that could not have been achieved alone, without the mutual striving, without the competition”<sup>342</sup>

This would suggest a need to rank or position oneself against another, be that individually or with a team in order to achieve the “level of excellence” Hyland describes and Dombrowski requires.

According to Sherif and Siedentrop, the Latin derivative and its meaning ‘to strive’ or ‘to come together’ suggests that competition is a continuing practice in which an individual or group of individuals compare and contrast their competitive sporting performances, evaluating each match or activity in reference to each other, in order to assess and improve each performance<sup>343344</sup>. However, Leah and Capel suggest that such a definition supports the supposition that the meaning of the word ‘competition’ implies a focus *solely* on the result of the performance, the outcome of the match<sup>345</sup>. They instead state it is co-operation that we should consider in creating an inclusive ‘working together’<sup>346</sup>, and that in contrast to competition;

“...co-operation can be viewed as the means or the process through which the learner interacts with others to achieve agreed goals.”<sup>347</sup>

When applied to the education of children and young people, this philosophy, according to Orlick, ensures that they learn to work together toward a shared goal, rather than against each other and “...immediately turn[s] destructive responses into helpful ones, [from which] the result is a sense of *gaining* not *losing*.”<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Hyland, (1988, p236)

<sup>343</sup> Sherif, (1978)

<sup>344</sup> Siedentrop, (1994)

<sup>345</sup> Leah and Capel, (2000)

<sup>346</sup> Definition taken from the Chambers Concise Dictionary (1991, p25, cited in Leah & Capel, 2000)

<sup>347</sup> Leah and Capel, (2000, p145)

<sup>348</sup> Orlick, (1979, p6-7, emphasis added)

It also worth noting at this point that sport is by definition ‘agonistic’, a term rooted in the Ancient Greek term ‘agonia’ – meaning contest<sup>349</sup>. The Greek notion of ‘agonia’ included ideas of struggling and scrapping for victory, and Boxill notes that, for the Greeks, it was not enough to simply beat your opponent, but you must “...internally deserve the victory if there was to be a true victory.”<sup>350</sup>. This meant that the emphasis was not just on the outcome, but on the process itself, on whether you had played hard but fair, and given your all, within the rules.

Whether current competitive sporting contests both in and out of the education sector can be held up to such an ideal is a discussion for later<sup>351</sup>. For now it enough to note that, firstly, this was an issue that was debated passionately in Ancient Greece<sup>352</sup> and, secondly, that there is an almost constant tension between *process* and *outcome* within the conceptual framework of competition, and, by proxy, what value is then attached to its use, either intrinsically or consequentially.

The etymology of the word ‘competition’ highlights its highly contested nature, perceived value, and its use in sport and Physical Education. It also provides an indication of some of the issues within this debate that will be explored later in more detail. The following section will provide further analysis to the competition/co-operation dynamic; whether the two can be combined to coexist, or if, in fact, they are mutually exclusive. It will also provide a greater understanding of the nature of competition. Whether Dombrowski *et al*’s root definitions and subsequent interpretations point to an intrinsically selfish and narcissistic framework, where – as Orlick claims – it is all about the ‘gaining’ over another. Or, in contrast, that competition might be actually provide an robust example of participants working toward a shared goal, either by themselves or in a team, to improve and excel.

We can now turn our attention to clarifying the value of competition and in doing so attempt to come to some sort of a conceptual framework to use and apply over the course of the forthcoming chapters.

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<sup>349</sup> Boxill, (2003)

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, (2003, p108)

<sup>351</sup> And interestingly, whether even the Greeks themselves managed to uphold such an ideal is debatable, and is discussed briefly in the next chapter and in a much more detailed manner in Dombrowski, (2009).

<sup>352</sup> See Dombrowski, (2009) for detailed insights into this discussion.

Given that the issue of competition in sport and Physical Education is currently so contentious<sup>353</sup>, it is first necessary to note that distinctions must be made between positive or negative *consequences* that occur from playing competitive sport and the positive or negative value found that is *intrinsic* to competitive sport. So any values that result from competing are not necessarily inherent to the nature of competition, because these sorts of values may have taken place because of some other reason, and not from the act of competition itself. Intrinsic values, on the other hand, will always be present in competition because those values are an inseparable part of what makes it ‘competition’, they are included among what Bergmann Drewe describes as the “...defining characteristics of what it means to compete.”<sup>354</sup>.

Using the two distinctions of the intrinsic and the consequential, it is now possible to map out a coherent structure and to discuss the various arguments that have been raised in the recent past.

### The Intrinsic Nature of Competition

There have been many charges made against the use of competition in sport, but without doubt the most prominent one is that competition is inherently selfish. As Boxill observes;

“Competition is selfish and egoistic, and it involves treating others as means, as enemies to be defeated, or obstacles thwarting one’s victory or success, to be removed by any means possible.”<sup>355</sup>

The resulting (and seemingly quite reasonable) conclusion that comes from such a statement is that competition must therefore be immoral, and the complete opposite to that of co-operation, which encourages the participants to work with, rather than against one another. If the objective of competition is to enhance one competitor’s place over that of another then it must follow that competition is immoral, a vice, since it advocates selfishness and selfish

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<sup>353</sup> See; [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), (2014a); [www.theindependent](http://www.theindependent), (2013); [www.theguardian.co.uk](http://www.theguardian.co.uk), (2012)

<sup>354</sup> Bergmann Drewe, (1998, p5)

<sup>355</sup> Boxill, (2003, p107)

behaviour<sup>356</sup>. Indeed, there are many examples throughout the history of competitive sport that display the type of behaviour that Boxill *et al* find so distasteful; fighting, diving, cheating, coercion, doping are just a few of the issues that now blight many sporting occasions, from school events to amateur matches, right up to the most influential of all; professional sports.

Such ethically objectionable acts on (and often off) the field points to what Kohn describes as a problem with;

“...the structure of mutually exclusive goal attainment. We need not know anything about the individuals involved to see the destructive potential of a system that says only one of them can be successful.”<sup>357</sup>

Such a structure inevitably produces (amongst other things) anger and heightened levels of anxiety which increase according to the situation and the sport. Part of the competitive structure within sport (and indeed, other areas of life) is that of ‘ranking’ yourself and/or your team before, during, and after a game. Ranking, Boxill’s first category, acts as a way of referencing your performance or that of your team against another, and in doing so pushes competitors to overcome others by adapting their technique and tactics, to attempt to discover who the ‘best’ is at any specific time or in a specific match<sup>358</sup>.

So, by using such a strategy, a runner, for example, can work out where they are in the field and what needs to be done in order to improve or maintain their position, (should they be winning) and make adjustments accordingly. For example, during the 2012 Olympics in London, Great Britain’s Mo Farah, running in the 5,000m running event, lay in 7<sup>th</sup> place with four laps to go. Surely and steadily he worked his way through the pack to 2<sup>nd</sup> place with just two laps remaining. Farah’s long-time training partner, the Canadian Galen Rupp, comes up through the back of the pack to briefly overtake Farah, only to fall away; in the end Farah times his push away from the front runners perfectly, winning his second Gold medal<sup>359</sup> of the Olympics. All throughout the thirteen and a bit minutes of the race, Farah is constantly

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<sup>356</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>357</sup> Kohn, (1986, p116)

<sup>358</sup> Boxill describes this type of competitive ranking as “...strategies of [a] physical [and] ...psychological nature...” (Boxill, 2003, p109)

<sup>359</sup> Farah had already won the 10,000m Gold medal in the days leading up to this event.

assessing and reassessing his tactics, attempting to counter opposing strategies from other runners, in what is an intricate and stressful experience and one which drains all involved both mentally and physically but, for Farah, it is about making sure his strategy will give him the best chance to succeed, and ultimately, win. Further to this, it is interestingly to note that both television commentators and experts alike watching the race commented that not only was Farah ‘tactically sound’ throughout the race, but also that ‘the Africans’<sup>360</sup> played into his [Farah’s] hands by running a ‘slower’, ‘more tactical race’<sup>361</sup> in an attempt to outwit him. This is as clear example of competitors battling with opposing strategies, with one competitor getting his just right and emerging victorious over the field. It’s interesting to note that competitions which are decided “...by purely non-aesthetic criteria...”<sup>362363364</sup>, such as running, seem to lack the negative connotations put forward so far regarding competition and its value, seemingly because its lacks the anxiety-inducing, confrontational nature of Boxill’s next category<sup>365</sup>.

Competitive sports such as tennis, football and basketball fall under the category Boxill describes as ‘face to face’<sup>366</sup> – where the game is changed somewhat from reacting and creating your own strategy to win, to facing your opponent/s down directly. This is where some of the criticisms that competition has as a concept begins to surface. Now the rival competitor stands across from you and directly dictates how you play the game, and you do the same to him; anxiety, stress and tension are increased as you attempt to beat your opponent. A new dimension is also added; the ability to dominate or be dominated by a competitor or rival team is now possible, if, for example one player is ranked number 1 in the world for their particular sport, while his opponent is ranked 250<sup>th</sup>, there is a distinct possibility that the number 1 player will not only win, but possibly humiliate the other in the process. When contact sports such as football, basketball are added into this equation, the tension is increased even more as direct contact between players becomes unavoidable in a fast-moving situation played in (relatively) small areas, and the ‘will to win’ spills over into anger, violence and deviance.

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<sup>360</sup> Eight of the fifteen runners were from countries within Africa (www.olympics.org, 2014), in a race that has been dominated historically by athletes from that continent (www.olympics.org, 2014).

<sup>361</sup> www.youtube.com, (2014)

<sup>362</sup> Boxill, (2003, p110)

<sup>363</sup> As opposed to ‘aesthetic’ competitions, such as gymnastics or figure skating

<sup>364</sup> Boxill (2003) is quick to clarify that that does not mean that competitions such as athletics do not necessarily lack an aesthetic element, only that results are not contingent upon this element of the event.

<sup>365</sup> So-called ‘face-to-face’ contests will be discussed in due course

<sup>366</sup> Boxill, (2003, p110)

Finally, this section considers competitive activities which Boxill describes as ‘head to head’<sup>367</sup> – sports such as rugby and boxing for example. Here we leave any figurative notions behind as opponents *literally* become obstacles standing in the way of success and victory, and assertion of a competitor’s will to win frequently turns into aggression. Competing bodies and mental strategies collide over and over again, and as Boxill states “...there is *more* frustration, *more* anxiety, and so more cause to treat your competitor as an enemy.”<sup>368</sup>

Competitive sports such as football and rugby represent the most alarming aspects of this brief analysis. Both have been (and still are) staples of the Physical Education curriculum in England and seem to represent a vital test to individuals’ ethical beliefs and decisions. A popular assumption is that competitive sport in some way mirrors life in general, the life pupils will grow up to play an integral part in. There are interesting parallels between competitive sport and competition in the wider world – whether these parallels are favourable is another question entirely. Perhaps the most obvious comparison to the sort of ruthless competition described is found in the world of finance. In finance and economics, many of the traits described above are positively encouraged in order to maximise profits and gain and, similar to competitive sport, these gains often result in the exclusion of individuals or groups (teams). Would this type of competitive ethic be an attractive value for the rest of society? Schaar certainly thinks not, as it would reduce human interaction to;

“...a contest in which each man competes with his fellows for scarce goods, a contest in which there is never enough for everybody, and where one man’s gain is usually another’s loss.”<sup>369</sup>

Thus competition is a zero-sum game where, in sport – as in life – it is used, as Fielding describes, as a ‘procedural device’ which encourages participants in either sphere to work “...against others in the spirit of selfishness”<sup>370</sup>, in a self-interested endeavour. Here, the ‘will to win’ morphs into ‘win at all costs’ and the outcome becomes the sole purpose for playing, the only marker for success, and inevitable transgressions occur in order to achieve that goal, whatever the cost.

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<sup>367</sup> Boxill, (2003, p110)

<sup>368</sup> Boxill, (2003, p111, emphasis added)

<sup>369</sup> Schaar, (1967, cited in Simon, 2004, p24)

<sup>370</sup> Fielding, (1976, p140)

An enormous amount of hyperbole is directed towards competitive sport, particularly high profile professional competitive sport. Often strong, sometimes vitriolic words and phrases are used to describe a particular match, and very often there are subtle (and not so subtle) connotations to war. Matches become ‘battles’ to be ‘fought’ or ‘conflicts’ where one opponent must ‘destroy’ the other. Such sensationalism is very unhelpful and perpetuates a long held view crystallised by George Orwell when he described competitive sport as “...war minus the shooting.”<sup>371</sup> In reality, sport is no Hobbesian ‘war of all against all’, and even though opponents compete, sometimes fiercely, there is, and must be, cooperation between teammates and even, to certain extent, competitors.

As has been discussed, there have been many accusations made against competitive sport and its value, or lack thereof. Many noted scholars concede that the particular charge that competition is inherently selfish is not without force<sup>372</sup> and, when applied to other areas of life this line of inquiry can certainly gain momentum, however, when applied to sport, it faces difficulty.

Simon points to a distinction between what is considered selfish, and what is considered in one’s self-interest, namely that although winning in competition is almost certainly in the player’s self-interest it does not necessarily mean it is selfish<sup>373</sup>. To clarify this distinction, consider the difference between the following two examples.

Former NBA basketball star Allen Iverson was frequently accused throughout his career of selfishly putting himself and his own interests before that of his team (which was, for the majority of his career, the Philadelphia 76ers<sup>374</sup>). Despite having a sensational list of personal achievements<sup>375</sup> and statistics<sup>376</sup> that suggest he always played his best for his team he was often accused of taking too many shots and making decisions during the game that were good for him, but not for the team. During the ‘Play Offs’ – the end of season knock out

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<sup>371</sup> George Orwell, (1945)

<sup>372</sup> Simon, (2004); Boxill, (2003); Drewe, (1998).

<sup>373</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>374</sup> Iverson played for 12 seasons with the 76er’s (1996-2007, 2009-10), (www.ESPN.com, 2014)

<sup>375</sup> Highlights included Rookie of the Year (1997), being made a 3-time NBA All Star (1999, 2001, 2005) and being named the League’s ‘MVP’ (Most Valuable Player) in 2001 (www.ESPN.com, 2014)

<sup>376</sup> Iverson ended with a regular season career average of 26.7 points per game (7<sup>th</sup> highest in the history of the NBA) and 29.7 points per game in the end of season ‘Play Offs’ (2<sup>nd</sup> highest in history behind only Michael Jordan) (www.basketball-reference.com, 2014)

competition to decide who would win the league that year – he would often take tough shots over passing to open teammates or, set plays at the end of tight matches which revolved around him rather than, for example, the specialist shot-maker that had been brought on to take the shot. Recently, Iverson’s style of play was described as “...too much low percentage, high-volume shooting...”<sup>377</sup> a player who seemingly put his own personal statistics, glory and opportunity to ‘take the winning shot’ above his team and the supporters, showing a lack of respect to all, to the detriment of himself and to all around him. This, Simon would argue, is a case of an individual disregarding the interests of his team in favour of his own selfish needs<sup>378</sup>.

Contrast this with the example of former England rugby fly-half Jonny Wilkinson, who famously trained and practised dutifully (sometimes too hard) in every aspect of the game, but paid particular attention to his kicking. His training and dedication to improve himself paid off for him and his team as he kicked the winning points to win the Rugby World Cup for England in 2003. Thus it is possible to see that, although his actions are in his own interests, these are not selfish interests because in drop kicking the winning goal it is in everyone else’s<sup>379</sup> interests as well.

Of course the scenario above is also levelled with another criticism. The fact that there must be a winner and loser, that one must gain and one must fail, another (perceived) negative trait inherent in competition. However, Weiss suggests that this is far too simplistic because players and teams that are defeated still gain much from a game. He states that the losing team;

“...benefit from the mere fact that they have engaged in a contest, that they have encountered a display of great skill, that they have made the exhibition of that skill possible or desirable, that they have exerted themselves to the limit, and that they have made a game come to be...”<sup>380</sup>

Metheny supports this view, and takes it further, encompassing both sets of competitors, suggesting that, *regardless* of result, the real value of competition is in the act of competing,

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<sup>377</sup> www.ESPNNBA.com, (2012)

<sup>378</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>379</sup> In this case ‘everyone else’ could be more accurately described as supporters of England

<sup>380</sup> Weiss, (1969, p183)

in the “...striving, the doing, the satisfaction of using himself fully within the limits of the situation...”<sup>381</sup>. So we begin to see a cooperative approach, where competitors strive to achieve, pushing each other to do their best, where competitors seek close games against evenly matched opponents, and the need to dominate or ‘destroy’ reduces the value of the competitive process.

So, if competitors *seek* the close game and the *best* opponent, then the value of competition resides in the challenge presented between competitors, and consequently through the cooperative attempt by opponents and opposing teams to produce the best contest they can for one another, as Simon describes;

“...competition in sports should be regarded and engaged in *not* as a zero-sum game but as a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge...”<sup>382</sup>

The ‘mutual quest’ describes the ideal sporting contest, where the tacit agreement between competitors to play to their best, within the rules, provides a conception of sport that is both ethically defensible<sup>383</sup> and underlines its cooperative value<sup>384</sup>. Seen through the lens of the ‘mutual quest for excellence’ the ‘ranking’ that takes place throughout sport before, during and after a match loses its aggressive, antagonistic dimension, a dimension that places great anxiety and stress on participants and leads to anger and deviance. The ranking process instead becomes an integral point of reference between competitors, a way of understanding what is required to win the next point, score the next goal *and* demands that some improvement is made to push themselves closer to excellence, be that adapting their play or changing their tactics.

This point can be best supported by updating and adapting Robert Nozick’s example of ‘the villager and Jerry West’<sup>385</sup>. A man – Zarathustra – lives in a remote village in the middle of nowhere, and can run 100m in 15 seconds flat. No one in the village can come close to running that fast and – quite logically – he believes he’s rather good at it, until one day a man comes to the village; his name is Usain Bolt. Bolt’s incredible speed (he immediately runs

<sup>381</sup> Metheny, (cited in Bergmann Drewe, 1998, p5)

<sup>382</sup> Simon, (2004, p27, emphasis added)

<sup>383</sup> Both Simon (2004) and Boxill (2003) are also keen to stress that while this is the ideal contest, it is not necessarily what happens in reality

<sup>384</sup> Simon, (2004); Boxill, (2003)

<sup>385</sup> Which can be found in Simon (2004, p29)

under 10 seconds without breaking a sweat) completely resets what Zarathustra and the rest of the villagers believe possible, who watch him in amazement.

As with Nozick's example, the imagined scenario here demonstrates that what is important here - what is considered as *substantial* achievement - is not easily detached from the performances of others; indeed, such achievement requires reference to the performance of others<sup>386</sup>. Before Bolt came to the village, Zarathustra would probably have been happy to have, over time, improved to run one or two seconds faster and be – justifiably – satisfied with what would have been deemed a significant improvement until Bolt turned up. Now, to coin a much-used sporting metaphor 'the goal posts have moved', the bar, post-Bolt, has been pushed higher, and what is considered substantial improvement has changed. Zarathustra might now reconsider his potential 'best', and, through training and practice expect to run 100m in 12 or 13 seconds, when before anything below 14 seconds seemed impossible. So we see that far from causing anger and anxiety, the 'ideal' competition shows that we compete against and strive together to push for one's best, using one another as reference points to understand what 'best' is and what improvements can be attempted to excel.

Seen in this way the 'mutual quest' provides competition with what Loland describes as 'optimal tension'<sup>387</sup>; it nullifies the need to 'destroy' your competitor, your 'enemy' and replaces it with "...the sweet tension and uncertainty of outcome..."<sup>388</sup> that is made possible through cooperation. Such cooperation allows for a respect for persons as *ends* rather than *means* as it creates a community of people (participants) with shared ends (that of achieving excellence within the rules) through a shared activity (competitive sport). This scenario allows competitors to enjoy each other's excellence and individuality through the 'mutual quest' and unite them in search for the 'truth' of supreme excellence in a particular moment or match, until the next opportunity arises to compete and cooperate in the search for excellence once again, because the outcome is never fixed or prearranged, and always represents the opportunity to find out what one is capable of, again and again.

Simon's 'mutual quest for excellence' may be criticised for being idealistic but that does not mean we cannot aspire to meet it. Seemingly this conception has answered the intrinsic

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<sup>386</sup> Simon, (2004); Leah and Capel, (2000)

<sup>387</sup> Loland, (2002, p149)

<sup>388</sup> Fraleigh, (1984; cited in Loland, 2002, p149)

concerns that were raised and supported the use of competition in sport. In the next section I will now consider the outcome or consequences that come from advocating the use of competition in sport, what values are produced, what criticisms there are and whether Simon's conception holds up when considering what results from any emphasis on competition.

### The Consequences of Competition

Much like the issues that surround the intrinsic nature of competition, there have been many criticisms levelled at the consequences of competition and what values results from its use. Perhaps the most prominent criticism is that competition in sport fosters a 'win at all costs' attitude which pushes participants to extremes such as cheating, harming themselves, harming opponents, coercion, taking drugs, and generally promoting dubious moral qualities, all as a consequence of putting 'the win' above all else. Such an attitude has been witnessed in many spheres of sport, most visibly in professional sport; it is an attitude which pushes competitors to extremes, often at the risk of their bodily and intellectual health<sup>389</sup>. When situated in an educational environment, this attitude not only restricts the educational opportunities of those involved<sup>390</sup> but could be viewed as immoral<sup>391</sup>. Some go further and claim that competition on this basis has no place in education whatsoever<sup>392</sup> and that competition is, in reality, a;

“...non-educational practice for children: an *exclusive*, not *inclusive*, practice that limits learning opportunities for most students”<sup>393</sup>

Such a claim is made on the basis of two main reasons; the first is that the chief outcome of sporting competition is to create a winner and a loser, separating individuals or teams into those who are deemed a success and those who are deemed failures. In isolation such a result may not be considered overly damaging to the losing competitor/s. However, if such a

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<sup>389</sup> Drewe, (1998)

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid*, (1998)

<sup>391</sup> Arnold, (1997)

<sup>392</sup> Campbell, (1974; cited in Drewe, 1997, p6)

<sup>393</sup> Grinski (1993, p11, emphasis added)

scenario takes place over the course of a season or number of school years it could create negative attitudes towards sport and to physical activity generally if participants, particularly young impressionable participants, are made to feel like failures over and over again<sup>394</sup>. Such a situation is not conducive to learning or for an individual's self-esteem, especially in an educational environment and must be fought against. Advocating a structure that creates lots of 'losers' (or 'failures' – with expectations to fail in the future)<sup>395</sup> is extremely harmful and clearly divides groups of people into winners and losers<sup>396</sup>, success and failures, in any sphere of life. In education creating a situation like this should be avoided at all costs if we are produce well-rounded individuals ready for later life.

Of course such a claim is often viewed as a *positive*, that winning and losing in competitive sport replicates winning and losing in life in general; from losing the house you want to buy to a higher bid or winning the contract over a rival company in business, competitive sport in education (or otherwise) prepares you for life's victories and defeats. In doing this competitive sport builds character through these experiences, experiences that then stand the individual in good stead for what lies ahead during their personal and professional lives<sup>397</sup> producing traits such as leadership, courage and discipline. Critics of this position however question whether such a competitive attitude really is essential to survive in society and who, in truth, is really best prepared (and benefits the most) from the use of competitive sport in Physical Education. Often competition in sport is compared to competition in business, and usually in the pejorative sense, concerning professional sports' increasingly business-like approach to competition, both on and off the field.

In the United States of America, such an approach has been around for decades, (professional) sports teams are called 'franchises' that can be moved from city to city<sup>398</sup> looking for the right 'customer base' or 'market' (as opposed to fan base) and players are

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<sup>394</sup> Bergmann Drewe (1998) suggests that such a scenario might even create a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' and the feeling that some participants continually on the losing side might just expect to lose (and feel bad) and simply drop out altogether to avoid repeating the outcome of competitive sport time and time again

<sup>395</sup> Fait and Billing, (1978)

<sup>396</sup> Such a divide has been, historically in English schools, highly visible, with privileges afforded to those successful in competitive sport, often to leading to the isolation of any who do not do so well. This discussion is taken up in Chapter 2

<sup>397</sup> A claim that has been made throughout the history of competitive sport and Physical Education – most explicitly in the preparation of young people (usually men) to train as soldiers for war (see Chapter 2 for further investigation on this subject)

<sup>398</sup> Sometimes even countries, as was the case (for example) with the MLB (Major League Baseball) team the Montreal Expos, which was relocated from Canada in 2005 to Washington D.C in the US, and renamed the Washington Nationals ([www.mlb.com](http://www.mlb.com), 2014)

given heavily incentivised contracts based on running a certain amount of yards or scoring a certain amount points<sup>399</sup>. This is an approach that has increasingly crept into European football in recent years, with managers given targets to be met or a certain minimum position in the league to be achieved in return for huge personal financial reward<sup>400</sup> or fail and face the repercussions, and possibly ‘the sack’. Whether such a ruthlessly competitive structure in professional sport is ethically defensible is questionable, even in business there might be reason to think that such an approach is counterproductive, as Coakley describes;

“...many managers have discovered that using competitive reward structures among employees often subverts the relationships the employees need to have with one another to perform their jobs efficiently. Success in today’s world often depends much more on a person’s ability to cooperate and to maintain intrinsic sources of motivation than on the ability to compete and the desire to dominate others.”<sup>401</sup>

Thus individuals whose only incentive is beat or dominate others (colleague or not) for nothing in return eventually isolate themselves from everyone and, ultimately, greatly reduce their chances of success. In a similar fashion to the ‘Cheats’ of Dawkins’ famous thought experiment ‘Suckers, Cheats and Grudgers’<sup>402</sup>, those who cooperate with one another (Dawkins calls them ‘the Grudgers’) by remembering who *did* help them (namely ‘Suckers’ and other ‘Grudgers’) and also those who didn’t help them (‘Cheats’) eventually thrive, while the ‘Cheats’ eventually pay the price for their selfishness in what is a market place of sorts, and become extinct. Coakley himself uses the examples of doctors and lawyers who create organisations that fight to restrict competition in their respective work environments and business leaders who advocate robust competition publicly only to privately attempt anti-competitive activities such as monopolising a particular sector<sup>403404</sup>.

<sup>399</sup> Go to: [www.nfl.com/features/freakonomics/episode-10](http://www.nfl.com/features/freakonomics/episode-10) (2014) for an interesting discussion on how incentivised contracts affect player performances in the NFL (National Football League).

<sup>400</sup> One notable example of the recent past is the contract given to Alan Pardew, manager of English Premier League football team Newcastle United who was given a ‘low’ basic annual salary of £450,000 a year (low relative to other managers in the League and compared to previous Newcastle managers such as Kevin Keegan who earned £3,000,000 basic per year) with generous bonuses for on-field successes ([www.theguardian.co.uk](http://www.theguardian.co.uk), 2010)

<sup>401</sup> Coakley, (1994, p100; cited in Bergmann Drewe, 1998, p8)

<sup>402</sup> Dawkins, (2006, p166)

<sup>403</sup> Coakley, (1994, p100; cited in Bergmann Drewe, 1998, p8)

<sup>404</sup> An interesting example of the latter scenario would be that of Google’s dominance of the android mobile phone market which is being investigated by the European Commission, who are being pressured by a group of businesses called ‘FairSearch’ whose main member is Microsoft ([www.thetelegraph.co.uk](http://www.thetelegraph.co.uk), 2013b), which has a long history of being accused of monopolisation itself ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 1999)

Some interesting issues are raised from this current discussion. The first is that what is suggested above does not mean that competition – in sport or any part of life – has no valuable outcome. There is undoubtedly value in winning and losing, success and failure, of experiencing both and learning from both. What is dangerous and damaging in an educational setting is *continued* success or continued failure<sup>405</sup> – possible in a sporting competition but hardly realistic if used as a preparatory tool for life after education. Continued, unchecked success only inflates the ego and sets unrealistic expectations for later life, while continued, unrelenting failure on the field, rather than inspiring the individual to keep trying and ‘teach’ them to lose ‘well’. This only serves to teach impressionable young people to insulate themselves against the feeling of constant failure by withdrawing themselves from any competitive (sporting or otherwise) situation, rejecting any challenge in order to protect themselves<sup>406</sup>.

The second point is that succeeding or winning is a perfectly acceptable attitude to take in competition, and a necessary part of Simon’s ‘mutual quest’. What is as damaging as the ‘win at all costs’ attitude described at the top of this section and in either the ruthless, hyper-competitive world of business or professional sport is a *lack* of desire to win, which diminishes the value of competitive sport just as powerfully as pushing everyone and anything out of the way for ‘the win’. A balance between two extremes, namely the *desire* to achieve is integral to the ‘mutual quest for excellence’ otherwise neither side is challenged or challenging in competition of *any* sort<sup>407</sup>.

The final issue surrounds ‘goods’ external to the process of competitive sport, discussed with regards to professional sport in the form of money earlier on, but just as corrosive within education when one considers the heavy influence of other ‘external goods’ such as medals, idolisation<sup>408</sup> and incentives such as sports scholarships. Incentives such as these can change the complexion of any given game and can lead – if such rewards are given to impressionable young people – to hubris, narcissism and unhealthy inflation of the ego. Such ‘scarce benefits’ external to the competition itself inevitably divert from the ideal of competition,

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<sup>405</sup> Fait and Billing, (1978) suggest this as well

<sup>406</sup> Child (1997, p98; cited in Leah and Capel, 2000, p154) concurs with this position, and that “...the overall effect [of competition] is to marginalise some children while the work of others is praised...”

<sup>407</sup> Boxill, (2003)

<sup>408</sup> A phrase Loland, (2002) uses to describe such things

shifting the focus away from the process and onto the outcome, the result of the competition, forcing competitors to consider cheating and other forms of deviance, because the only perceived value is in victory<sup>409410</sup>.

The discussion of reward, external to the process itself, is one which has been debated in educational circles for many years. The ever increasing demand for testing throughout school life (both teachers and pupils)<sup>411</sup>, and the introduction of performance-related pay for school teachers in Primary and Secondary schools<sup>412413</sup> has forced teachers to move their focus away from holistic education to simply teaching pupils how to pass an exam or a test<sup>414</sup>, pushing the focus from process to outcome.

When considering the negative consequences of competition, a compelling picture is drawn which frames its use in Physical Education as damaging and highly detrimental to the development of children and young people. It ensures that, through our adoration of competition and all it can apparently teach, the system is producing ruthlessly competitive, cruel individuals, willing to step over anyone to get what they want. This ethos is supported by the educational structure and its attitude towards its wider processes, cemented through sport and in Physical Education, and ultimately, carried through into their personal and professional lives. But is such a picture accurate? For such an ethos to be so robustly advocated it must have potential outcomes and consequences that make its use worthwhile. This is topic of the next section.

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<sup>409</sup> Boxill, (2003)

<sup>410</sup> An interesting current example where (apparently) only 'victory' matters is the call from the coach of the Dutch team at the 2014 football World Cup (whose team lost a penalty shoot out to Argentina at the semi-final stage, meaning his team would have to play Brazil in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> play-off game) to remove the play-off from the tournament because it is 'unfair', and meant his team could go home as 'losers' and that the "...there is only one award that counts and that is becoming world champions." (www.bbc.co.uk, 2014b)

<sup>411</sup> In 2013, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw reintroduced formal tests in Primary and Secondary schools that had been dropped in 2008, much to the consternation of many teachers and policy makers who believe there to be far too much testing already (almost every school year from the age of 5 years old is rigorously tested) (www.theguardian.co.uk, 2013)

<sup>412</sup> Such measures have led the Teacher's Union Voice to describe introducing performance pay as creating a 'punitive culture' within schools. (www.tes.co.uk, 2014)

<sup>413</sup> The OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) have found no 'clear link' between performance pay and raising standards in schools based on studies in thirty industrialised countries around the world, including France and Germany (www.bbc.co.uk, 2012)

<sup>414</sup> This was the concern of Ken Boston, Chief Executive of the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) in 2009, that teachers were simply 'teaching to the test' rather than focus on the educational experience of the individual pupil, to make sure that schools met their targets and improved in the school league tables as a result of constant testing in schools (www.telegraph.co.uk, 2013)

As stated in the previous section, two of the most common preconceptions rolled out whenever competition in sport is discussed centres around what values or traits are developed (or not) from participating in sport, and what sort of person that creates. Another is that this competitive process is somehow necessary and relevant in preparation for life in a competitive, adult world after education. I will now look at these in turn.

As discussed earlier, the stereotypical view of competitive sport and its educational value is that it develops positive character traits and virtues, such as dedication, determination and bravery, traits that translate easily into (eventual) working life and are reaffirmed again both on and off the field after that, a view that has deep roots in England historically<sup>415</sup>.

While such a view is not without force, it is difficult to categorically say that such a development takes place within an individual simply by participating in competitive sport. Having said that, the value of competitive sport might lie in the *strengthening* of traits that already existed in an individual<sup>416</sup> – rather creating new ones – while inspiring them to unearth and develop other virtues that perhaps were previously lying dormant. So competitive sports still have an important part to play, even if its impact on the development of individual traits is less than is popularly considered. Competitive sport could have an important role in demonstrating and articulating certain core values, be that as an individual, as part of team or even within a particular sport. This is what Simon describes as the “...expressive function of sports...”<sup>417</sup>

So, for example, a sporting competition could exhibit values such as working together or devotion (to a cause), which is then revealed and displayed externally, literally ‘showing’ how excellence has been achieved through training and working to develop those values and traits within an individual or team<sup>418</sup>. This can take place at every level, from the school playing field to the professional sports stadium, but what is important to note is that by accepting a sporting challenge such as this, positive traits (consequences) can be acknowledged and displayed to the benefit of all. This can also go some way to explaining why the ‘win at all costs’ attitude so concerns all involved in education and beyond (and quite rightly). It might also explain why there is some truth in the frequently (and too easily) used

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<sup>415</sup> Which is discussed in detail in the Chapter 2

<sup>416</sup> Edwards, (1973)

<sup>417</sup> Simon (2004, p23) adapts Feinberg’s (1970) conception of the ‘expressive function of punishment’

<sup>418</sup> Reid, (2012)

phrase ‘it’s not whether you win or lose, it’s about how you play the game’. To clarify, I will now consider another example to explain this point further.

The ‘will to win’ has been framed previously as an aggressive, negative value, with the suggestion that such an activity as competitive sport is taken *too* seriously if all else is forgotten in pursuit of victory, however, what should be considered is that;

“...winning is not necessarily a sign of competitive success, and losing is not necessarily a sign of competitive failure.”<sup>419</sup>

At the 2014 Football World Cup, the Costa Rican football team, ranked 66<sup>th</sup> in world at the beginning of 2013<sup>420</sup>, progressed, against all odds, to the quarter finals, coming top of a group in which they were the only team not to have previously won the World Cup<sup>421</sup>. They went onto to beat Greece on penalties in ‘the round of 16’<sup>422</sup> before finally succumbing to the much-fancied Netherlands<sup>423</sup> on penalties in the Quarter-final. No one expected this small South American country to win a game, let alone top their group and then come within a penalty kick of progressing to the last four of a World Cup. But the results do not tell the whole story, because it is the *manner* in which they played which captured the imagination of experts and spectators alike. Seen in this way Costa Rica’s eventual defeat cannot be viewed as a competitive ‘failure’, their free, almost naïve attacking style caught many by surprise and was deeply refreshing in a sport which is often accused of ‘playing it safe’, where professional teams are regularly accused of playing to ‘not to lose’ rather than ‘playing to win’<sup>424</sup>.

The Costa Rican’s surprise progression in the World Cup was certainly a case where many positive (team) values were displayed, both in the form of human excellence and self-

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<sup>419</sup> Simon, (2004, p36)

<sup>420</sup> According to the official FIFA rankings (www.FIFA.com, 2014a)

<sup>421</sup> Costa Rica came top of a group which included Uruguay (currently ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the world and previous winners in 1930 and 1950), Italy (ranked 9<sup>th</sup> and winners in 1934, 1938, 1982 and 2006), and England (ranked 10<sup>th</sup> and winners in 1966) (www.FIFA.com, 2014b)

<sup>422</sup> Ranked 12<sup>th</sup> (www.FIFA.com, 2014c)

<sup>423</sup> Ranked 15<sup>th</sup> (www.FIFA.com, 2014d)

<sup>424</sup> This point is probably best exemplified by the style of Jose Mourinho, currently the manager of Chelsea Football Club, who was accused by the Liverpool manager of ‘parking two buses’ during a match in the English Premier League last season. The phrase means that Mourinho set up his team in an ultra-defensive style, with all 10 outfield players frequently behind the ball. (www.bbc.co.uk, 2014c)

expression<sup>425</sup>. This was a team with deep ties and shared values with that of their country and their supporters<sup>426427</sup> who shared in their joyous journey to the latter stages of the tournament. The Dutch too, who beat the Costa Ricans, were right to feel happiness and joy in victory despite the apparent gap in quality (according to FIFA rankings at least) because both teams met the challenge set by one another. It is close contests such as these where Simon's 'mutual quest for excellence' is most clearly fulfilled, the values of courage, determination and trust (from both countries) visible for all to see.

On such evidence it is difficult to see how competition fails to prepare us for life in the wider world. Perhaps the values as described above are only superficial, only *symbolise* the values we aspire to in our everyday lives, and that somehow competitive sport does nothing more than create scenarios and narratives that can be easily described and manipulated into something 'more', something more morally tangible and valuable than its really is. But the reality of life in contemporary western society, where competition for those 'scarce benefits' mentioned earlier becomes ever fiercer, might suggest that these values are not just symbolic, but integral if one is to succeed in modern life<sup>428</sup>. The sort of character traits that have been discussed already are consequently seen as part of an ideal preparation in integrating into capitalist society, driven by competitive free markets, thus, one might argue that the outcome of competition in sport is to learn and understand the concept of competition *itself*. Taking such an approach, and encouraging competition in Physical Education is;

“...a key element of the individualism that underpins free-market capitalism and consumerism...”<sup>429</sup>

So competition becomes a necessary mechanism in creating productive members that can smoothly assimilate into society and make a valuable impact.

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<sup>425</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>426</sup> Upon their triumphant arrival back into San Jose, the capital of Coast Rica, midfielder Celso Borges spoke of the teams 'mental stability' in times of pressure and that there was no 'magic' to their success, rather that they (the team) trained hard for three years and worked to the same principles, trusting each other and the system they 'play through', saying they were 'hurt but happy' with the way they performed. (www.theguardian.com, 2014b)

<sup>427</sup> Perhaps the deep connection and shared values between the Costa Rican team and the wider population can be best summed up by Victor Morales, a shop owner in San Jose, who said "Our muchachos [loosely translated to mean 'boys'] showed them [the rest of the world] who we really are." (www.theguardian.com, 2014c)

<sup>428</sup> Bergmann Drewe, (1998); Leah and Capel, (2000)

<sup>429</sup> Evans and Davies, (1988, p14; cited in Leah and Capel, 2000, p153)

A final comment that relates to both the ‘win at costs’ attitude and competitive sport’s potential outcome as part of preparation for life after education relates to the notion of equality of opportunity or, in sporting parlance, ‘a level playing field’. Earlier in the chapter the discussion turned to inequalities that were produced as result of competitive activity, that there must be ‘winners’ in any competition, so there must be losers, and that the ‘losers’ might eventually reject any attempt to engage with competitive sport because of the negative feelings (amongst other things) they would incur. However to suggest that such a result renders the outcome unequitable would not be accurate, for although competitive sport might well result in unequal *treatment*, it does not mean that competition in sport more widely is inequitable or unfair<sup>430</sup>. I will now explain this point in more detail, using a theoretical example.

A football coach has a selection dilemma; one place left on the team with two players vying for the final position, the first player, called Garrincha, is universally recognised as the better of the two players and the coach is of the same opinion, starting him in the match, where he plays 70 minutes before being substituted for the other player (Denilson) who plays the remaining 20 minutes. Now in order for both Garrincha and Denilson to be treated *equally*, defined by Dworkin as “...the right to an equal distribution of some opportunity of resource or burden...”<sup>431</sup> both players should play one 45 minute half each, irrespective of their value to the team and regardless of who is considered the ‘better’ player, a situation at odds with the nature of competitive sport. What should be applied in this situation is what Dworkin describes as *difference* “...the right to be treated with the same respect as anyone else...”<sup>432</sup> which is what the coach has done – she has shown equal respect and consideration to both players, but picked one player over the other based on merit. So, Garrincha and Denilson have been treated in different ways but, importantly, given the same level of respect.

Such an interaction closely mirrors similar practices in life – such as applying for a job. One job, ten applicants; the job cannot be split ten ways as would be required to ensure equal treatment, so a selection is made based solely on merit, experience and achievement. Just because there is only one ‘winner’ does not mean the other nine have been cheated in any way; their relative strengths and weaknesses have been considered, and they have ‘lost’ (on

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<sup>430</sup> Simon, (2002)

<sup>431</sup> Dworkin, (1978, p227)

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid*

this occasion) but they have been treated with respect none the less, with legislation (like the rules in a competitive sporting contest) in place to ensure such an a process is transparent, fair and ethically sound. Of course there are numerous cases in both sport and work where the ideal scenario just described does not take place, but attempts are made to improve this process and to ensure as much as possible everyone is given a ‘fair chance’ to succeed. Perhaps the best example which covers both areas of life is the introduction in United States of the so-called ‘Rooney Rule’ in 2003 in the NFL (National Football League);

“...which requires NFL teams to interview [at least] one black or ethnic minority candidate for head coaching and senior football operation opportunities that become available, as part of a transparent and open recruitment process.”<sup>433</sup>

Now this does not mean that black or minority candidates are simply *given* the job, rather such a rule gives them the ‘equal footing’ with their fellow candidates that, previously, they did not have<sup>434</sup>. Thus we see respect for persons observed as previously described and the equality of opportunity to excel, to strive together, to challenge one another in the ‘mutual quest for excellence’.

A number of themes and issues emerge from this attempt to reach a ‘conception’ of competition. The first is that, *prima facie*, there seems to be some inherent contradictions to competition, especially when applied to a Physical Education setting. How can participants in school (and out of school for that matter) learn to be good, moral citizens of the world from playing competitive sport, when the primary goal in ‘winning’ seems to be beating another person or persons in the process of attaining that goal. The first thing to say in response to this question is that competitive sport in Physical Education – as I have alluded to at times throughout this Chapter and explained in greater detail in the previous Chapter – has often been ‘used’ to add value for other ends historically in England.

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<sup>433</sup> www.bbc.co.uk, (2011)

<sup>434</sup> The success of the rule in the NFL (in 2011 13 out of 32 teams had a BME Coach or General Manager (Ibid, 2011) has led for calls for a similar rule in the Football Leagues in the UK, where currently there are no BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) managers working at any of the 92 Football Leagues. At the start of the 2013/14 season (correct as of 14<sup>th</sup> March 2014); there were five BME managers working across the four Leagues, but they have all been sacked in the intervening months. (www.bbc.co.uk, 2014e)

Another key component in using the competitive element in Physical Education wisely is that of *moderation* – finding a balance between having no desire and having too much so that participant's energies are directed in a healthy way, both physically and mentally. In doing so perhaps then a more inviting appeal can be made at both ends of participants competitive appetites, instead of creating an exclusive environment for those who already need no persuading to join in in the first place, creating interest and understanding to enjoy and learn from bodily pursuits. The criticism that competitive sport is very much an exclusive environment is not without force, in particular critics point to the rampant inequalities that result from its use. But, in the ideal conception of competition, the distinction made between inequality and difference means that competition has a very valuable role to play in overtly displaying the positive value of respect for persons. Valuable because this 'respect' is not blind, it is a respect based on the merits of that person as an individual, and, if such processes are used in the correct and ideal fashion, should create a virtuous circle which 'spirals out' to include respect for the individual, groups, communities, regions, countries and so on.

Respect for persons is not simply achieved from teaching and understanding what 'difference' as opposed to 'equality' is however. This is just part of a cooperative process which must be emphasised for competition to have any real ethical value. By focussing on process rather than outcome, the complexion of competition is radically changed. Through Simon's 'mutual quest for excellence through challenge' we see the possibility of learning, *regardless* of the result: success not limited to, and contingent upon, whether you win or lose. This is not a soft, ever-so-slightly condescending attempt to placate the naysayers who believe competitive sport highlights and reveals all the worst human traits but, rather, a vital way of viewing competition as an integral educational tool to teach cooperation, understanding winning and losing and all the component parts that encompasses. Such an approach removes much of the anxiety and aggression that is created if competition is considered in the narrow terms of seeing the person at the opposite end of the pitch as 'enemy' and teaches understanding and respect in a world where such qualities sometimes seem in short supply.

If the 'mutual quest' is the ideal conception of competition (and I propose it is), then we face a quandary to get it realised in reality, both in Physical Education and (with I suspect even greater difficulty) the public consciousness generally. The reason for this is that competitive sport mirrors the wants and needs of society; it seems to reflect whatever the pervading

attitudes are at the time. As with the example of the World Cup Coach who reflects the very business-like approach to football, taking the ‘win or go home’ approach, competitive sport is currently in a cycle of hyper-competitiveness, which very much reflects the current attitude of wider society, as people retreat to survive in difficult times. The question for educators, policy makers and academics is whether Physical Education wants to continue to be part of this cycle, reinforcing consumerist and capitalist values by emphasising individualism, (perhaps fearing that Physical Education, as a subject, might lose its legitimacy if it fails ‘to toe the line’) focussing on outcome or product and generally preparing the next generation in a way that ensures the status quo; a group of people who are willing to step over each other to get what they want.

What is required by all involved is to focus on using competition in Physical Education positively, by way of the ‘mutual quest’, of emphasising striving *together* rather than *against* in pursuit of excellence, which will produce the vital values needed to produce virtuous citizens, ready for life after education. Such an approach takes a courage of conviction which can be hard to find in any sphere of life, and, as will be shown in the following chapter, can leave you in the minority, shouting into the wind. Indeed, where the history of competition in Physical Education is concerned, it seems only one thing is certain; that it is, and has been, in a constant state of flux.

## **Chapter 4 - A Normative Suggestion for the Conception of Competition**

As it stands, competitive sport, as part of Physical Education, has been ill conceived, misused, misappropriated and, at times, disregarded. History has shown us that, despite its prominence in most civilised cultures, it has rarely been viewed as a legitimate educational tool. This has come about for a number of reasons and at one time or another, competitive sport has been held up as an integral part of creating individuals who can be a productive members of their community to being pushed as a symbol of all that is wrong with an aggressive, overly-competitive world.

As illustrated, the ‘meaning’ of competition in sport has evolved over time, under influence from many of the cultures described in previous chapters. Arguably, the most prominent of these cultures has been the public school system in England. The public schools traded heavily on traditions and myths<sup>435</sup>, which became part of a rigorous competitive structure that would go on to influence grammar and state schools, putting great value on conformity, aggression and winning. The current Coalition Government continues this trend in using competitive sport as a tool to educate the next generation on how to prepare the competitive world they will enter. Much of their rhetoric and discourse is around competitive sport as a product to equip and avail us with the skills we need to merely *survive*, rather than *flourish*, in a hyper-competitive, unsympathetic and calculating society; where success comes at the cost of our own well-being. But this narrow view of what competitive sport can achieve is very limiting and does nothing to expose the extraordinary qualities and values it has as an education tool, its potential to instil in us the moral fibre we need to make a difference in our lives and the lives of others, the ability it has to really *show* what human beings can achieve, both on and off the field of play.

In this final chapter, I propose a conception of competition that rallies against some the limiting ones that have been discussed in previous chapters and against the current conception of competition in Physical Education today. A direction that would have the

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<sup>435</sup> Such as the reward structure used for students that performed well, which included being allowed to use a walking cane, wear certain colours or have different cuff lengths according to success in competition (Holt, 1989)

potential to legitimise the subject and force the public at large, to reconsider its own understanding of competition and what it can teach us.

In the previous chapters it was explained that competitive sport has been used extol both positive and negative traits in an individual, in the choices they make and the consequences of their actions. I have also explained how competitive sport can be a force for ‘bad’ as much as for ‘good’ and that various cultures, including ours currently, has taken the easier path to conceive competitive sport of rampant individualism, materialism and love of the ‘external’. Such a description could readily describe the Ancient Greek Olympics too<sup>436</sup>, but their evolution (discussed in Chapter 2) of competitive sport and its use, built on philosophical foundations, is cause for much hope. It is to them and – in particular – the Athenian conception of competitive sport advocated chiefly by Aristotle, I look to now to frame this ‘ideal’ conception of competition and how it might be best used within Physical Education.

#### *Arête, Kalokagathia, Eudaimonia and the ‘ethical community’*

We live in an austere time. Global markets around the world are struggling, fears of further recessions, job losses and cuts loom large in the lives of many. There is growing concern that in reaction to these straightened times people are growing anxious, looking inward, and looking out for themselves, perhaps at the cost of their own well-being and that of their community<sup>437</sup>. Such is the impact of our current economic and social situation that the current government have taken steps to try to monitor the nation’s happiness, in an attempt gauge the general wellbeing of the country and to see and understand if we are achieving our ‘life goals’; if we are flourishing<sup>438</sup>. The Greek word for flourishing, *eudaimonia*, can also be considered a general term for ‘well-being’<sup>439</sup>, but like the well-being considered by the Coalition Government, this is no passive, self-satisfied contentment, but rather an active and productive effort to exercise one’s abilities intellectually and physically, testing your capabilities in practice, in attempt to lead ‘a good life’. In this sense, competition acts as a paradigm example where such a thing can happen, because (as has been discussed

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<sup>436</sup> Although such a thing is not perhaps widely known outside academe

<sup>437</sup> The so-called ‘Generation Y’ are the “18-30 year olds, sceptical towards the state and more faith in themselves as individuals. Post war collectivism is a distant memory.” (www.bbc.co.uk, 2014)

<sup>438</sup> Other countries, such as Canada and France, are also considering doing this (www.theguardian.co.uk, 2010)

<sup>439</sup> Graham, (2004, p54)

previously) the Athenian ‘ideal’ conception of competition involves the virtue of *arête*, meaning ‘excellence’, an integral part of *eudaimonia* or ‘flourishing’. But this claim requires further investigation in order to discover why this conception is appropriate to use.

One of the recurring claims with regards to competition and its value is that it creates selfish, self-interested individuals, only willing to promote themselves and their cause, with no consideration for others. Such a view is arguably justified in the current climate, where there is such a concentrated effort to support the ‘hyper-competitive’ attitude, both in and out of Physical Education. But, as I intend to show, such a view is both erroneous and illogical, not to mention deeply unhealthy.

Recalling earlier discussions, Aristotle supported the ideal of *kalokagathia*, which, rather than focussing too heavily on one narrow area of life (for example *just* sport or *just* business), advocated combining bodily and intellectual endeavours in the pursuit of excellence. One way of achieving this was through training (for sporting competition), which was a basis for forming ‘good’ character traits (or virtues). Such training, or practices, creates communities, which cooperate with one another to recognise internal goods and nurture strong social virtues which are then put into practice<sup>440</sup>. This forms part of the understanding of Simon’s ‘mutual quest for excellence’<sup>441</sup> but also impresses upon us the realisation that in competitive sport (as in life) we do not work alone, we do not achieve anything independently, that we are in fact part of a community, or series of interconnected communities that form part of (collective) successes and failures. Physical Education, by using competitive sport, is the ideal platform to highlight this idea. Involvement in competitive sport and its community involves interacting with teammates, competitors (both in and out of school) and coaches or teachers. It also links one’s own biography and with that of the school and its history, where previous standards of excellence play a part in your own, and in turn, your achievements will eventually do the same for the next set of pupils. In this way this is a ‘ethical community’<sup>442</sup>, one which focuses on striving *together* to achieve excellence in an *ethical*, rather than purely *technical* way, as our trials and tribulations become interlinked with one another, and become what we have *in common*.

The ‘mutual quest for excellence’ has shown that the self-interested attitude cannot form the basis of ethical values in professional sport. So the ethical replaces the pragmatic *I* with *we*,

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<sup>440</sup> MacIntyre, (1984)

<sup>441</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>442</sup> Morgan, (2006)

and in doing so recognises others as essential to the individual's own being and subsequently necessary if *our* common good is to be realised. So, questions such as;

“who am *I*?” is [now] inseparable from the question ‘who are *we*?’ and the question ‘who are *we*?’ is inseparable from the question ‘what should we *do*?’,<sup>443</sup>

This last question represents an important move away from the pragmatic way of thinking the Coalition hold up because it inquires what precisely makes a community as opposed to a simple collection of indiscriminate individuals with nothing in common. It is this sort of question – to borrow a sociological turn of phrase – that is the ‘glue that holds us together’ and gives value to our collective identity from which we can take ethical nourishment<sup>444</sup>.

But this *we* must be unwavering if any community is to be considered an ethical community, it must be based in mutual trust and cooperation. Through such relationships our intentions will become ethical because the individual participants will no longer be chasing self-interested ends in a Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ scenario that supersedes all else, including notions of playing for ‘the team’, because in the ‘ethical community’, *we* means that individuals become bound in collective aims. Think of the Costa Rican team in Chapter 3, whose collective belief in themselves and their teammates was irrevocably tied to the values of their country and the people back home. So we see that competition need not be translated into meanness, anxiety inducing individualism, selfishness and outcome but in fact can be a tool to educate individuals on the intellectual, physical and moral benefits of working together productively, in turn producing healthy, happier, community-minded people. With this in mind, I will now investigate the more specific ways in which Aristotle's philosophy can inform this conception of competition, and how it can then serve as part of Physical Education and translate into the outside world.

### *Sophrosyne* and the distinction between skill (*Technē*) and excellence (*arête*)

Aristotle's philosophy of moderation (*sophrosyne*) extends and permeates throughout the attempt to achieve *arête* and highlights a holistic approach that does not favour one particular

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<sup>443</sup> Morgan, (2006,p69, emphasis added)

<sup>444</sup> As opposed to the rigorously exclusive environment of the English public school discussed in Chapter 2 for example

subject, but instead asks to find a balance between all things. This includes individual virtues key to education, such as (for example) being honest and telling the truth.

Competition represents the opportunity to be tested to be honest in a very real, very immediate way, in a highly pressured situation, when emotions can get the better of you, when the will to win might cloud your judgement. Honesty is essential to the ‘ethical community’<sup>445</sup>, essential to the relationships that bind it, because dishonesty inhibits the ‘quest for excellence’<sup>446</sup> leaving a focus only on outcome, on results, and returns back to the deceiving attitude of winning ‘at all costs’. The reason for this is because anything that happens, good or bad, is cultivated in that ‘community’, be it educational or otherwise. To clarify this, consider Plato’s distinction between skill (*technē*) and excellence/virtue, (*arête*). He said that the value of skill originates from virtue<sup>447</sup>, so, while deceiving in competition (such as a bowler in cricket disguising his action during his run up to bowl) could be considered a valued skill, its value lies in the discipline, creativity and imagination it took to do it. In that sense recall Boxill’s<sup>448</sup> example of ‘referencing’ in Chapter 3, which continually asks rival competitors to honestly assess their opponent as techniques, skills and games evolve. The virtues above are so called because they can readily translate into values commendable in society. Contrast this with dishonesty (such as diving in football), which negates that mutual trust to excel and so lacks virtue and value, this not *arête*, but mere egoistic excess which can teach nothing but fear and self-loathing.

#### Process and Internal ‘goods’ through the ‘Mutual Quest for Excellence’

Throughout the preceding chapters I have discussed or alluded to competition as a form of ‘truth-seeking’, a way to discover who is ‘the best’, until the next time when the search for ‘the best’ and ‘the truth’ start all over again. A view such as moderation might be seen as something of an ‘easy way out’, a failure to commit, a lack of courage. Not so. This conception accounts for the, shall we say, less attractive side of competition. Conflict is unavoidable on the field of play, as it is in society, this view does not advocate shying away from confrontation, indeed sometimes individuals need to face the opposition, not to compromise or ‘play it safe’. Neither does it expect anyone to ignore their desire for victory.

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<sup>445</sup> Morgan, (2006)

<sup>446</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>447</sup> Plato; (cited in Reid, (2012, p195)

<sup>448</sup> Boxill, (2003)

All these things are still possible through the ‘mutual quest for excellence’ and the ‘ethical community’ by way of moderation and virtues such as fairness and justice. Both are essential to our understanding of democracy and meritocracy, and to transferring that understanding into life after education. In Chapter 3 I discussed the distinction between being treated *equally* and being treated *differently* and how, through competitive sport, we saw democratic and meritocratic processes in reality. The (ideal) process continues throughout the structure of a competitive game, from selection (as described with the example Garrincha and Denilson in that Chapter 3) to competition (through ‘the mutual quest’) and finally to the result, through sportsmanship between competitors.

The reality however, can be quite different, and as has been described throughout, attitudes can often be aggressive and ‘win at all costs’ – and rather than a fair, closely contested competition we see forced humiliation, competitors wanting to ‘kill off’ the game. Such a view makes it difficult to believe that justice and fairness can be compatible with competition, but it can be, as long as it is a good, closely contested, assertive competition, producing internal goods (such as respect, courage and humility) that is emphasised in Physical Education rather than attempts to dominate, attempts to destroy. Such attitudes have no place in any virtuous conception of competition, no educational value to speak of and none of the broadly democratic values of a ‘good’ contest with a valued, worthy opponent.

#### Moderation: Overconfidence, Fear and the expression of values

In the chapter detailing the history of competition, I explained how competitive sport could potentially build character, character essential to success in various spheres of life, most notably in war. While such claims have often proved unhelpful, they contain a reasonable claim, that, competition can indeed produce in individuals virtuous traits such as, for example, courage. Again, Aristotle’s appeal to moderation in all situations is clear here, where he describes the need to strike a balance between (over)confidence and fear<sup>449</sup>. Such a description lends itself well to be cultivated and displayed in a competitive situation because courage relies profoundly on intelligent judgment and (through practice) an ability to make coherent decisions despite fear, time pressures or whatever the situation might be. This is an essential educational function in competition, where one can learn and fine-tune the balance

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<sup>449</sup> Aristotle, (cited in Reid, 2012, p126)

between confidence and over confidence (hubris), between controlling fear and letting fear control you. Educationally speaking, such a scenario fosters not only courage, but humility and understanding that you might make a decision within a competitive match that causes your team to win or lose, but what is important is that you made the decision and learnt from it, and understand your fallibility and strengths in the process. Such processes are essential to better understanding yourself and your relationships with that of your community and are explicitly transferrable into adult life.

So we begin to understand how competition can play an important role outside of the sphere of education, by showing and expressing values that are relevant and useful in the lives we lead beyond it. To reiterate that these values are not honed in complete seclusion and that competitive sport generally is not 'separate' from 'real' life, which would diminish its value significantly, I now consider this issue in more detail, as it is critical to the valuing of competition, and to the legitimatisation of the conception for Physical Education.

#### Virtues in Competition and Physical Education: Beyond the Symbolic

We have already discussed how for a virtue to really be a virtue, it must transcend its immediate 'community'<sup>450</sup>, so if courage is realised and refined in competitive sport, it is only conceived in terms of a 'virtue' if it is of worth outside of that environment. But this needs clarification. These 'communities' might be separate, but they have one constant running through them; the individual who 'lives' in each of them, and so, for virtues to have purpose, meaning and authenticity they must be digested and understood as part of the 'whole' of the individual<sup>451</sup>. When this is understood we see that competitive sport is not restricted to the limited 'good' of Physical Education, and that, in turn, Physical Education is not limited to Education and so on, until, finally, we understand that all these different spheres of life come together to form who we are and that we, essentially, are the 'same' in each of them. This strengthens the position and understanding of competitive sport and the importance it has because of its ability to explain who 'we' are, to test us. It also explains that competitive sport does have a function beyond the superficial, beyond mere symbolism; it is

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<sup>450</sup> MacIntrye, (1984)

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid*

fundamentally part of ones attempt at *arête* within the different areas of an individual, and ultimately part of the aim for *eudaimonia*.

This is not to say that competitive sport always achieves such ends, because, as I shown in previous chapters, clearly, it does not. There will always be a tension between what we *want* and what *need* to live healthy, happy and virtuous lives, and sport does not always reward the right values or motivations to be virtuous, and in that sense we should not look to governing bodies such as FIFA to extoll virtue, or promote internal ‘goods’. However, competition in Physical Education does have the ability, if utilised in the right way, to empower people to do just that, to educate and inculcate compassion and understanding, as well as other internal ‘goods’ into the cooperative venture through the ‘mutual quest for excellence’<sup>452</sup> to produce a wider ‘ethical community’<sup>453</sup> beyond the confines of the school gates. Considering this, the ethos that underpinned and drove Labour’s ‘Game Plan’ document in the early 2000’s closely matches the approach I have attempted to advocate. Labour’s policy (however brief) was an attempt to use sport (amongst other things) to produce real change in England as a ‘community’, through the consideration of what social outcomes sport - both in and out of school – could achieve.

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<sup>452</sup> Simon, (2004)

<sup>453</sup> Morgan, (2006)

### Conclusion

As has been described previously, we live in increasingly aggressive, materialistic and narcissistic world. A world of instant gratification, a world which makes demands relating to what *I* want, what *I* desire, of extreme individualism, of hyper-competitiveness. There have been various attempts across history to address this issue, and there have been also attempts to harness it. Competition has been used as part of Physical Education since the subject existed, and is a constitutive part of what it is. It has been used for various means, almost always with an appreciation for its potential, its immediacy to move people, to show them at their best, or at their worst, to express great moments of tension, of humility, of joy, of pain.

But this potential has often been misused, with competitive sport used as a way of advocating and educating young people that greed, aggressiveness, deceit and a lack of compassion for others is a necessary way to survive, a way to be successful. But there is only instrumental value in such an approach, and the consequent issues surrounding well-being that have been discussed are an inevitable repercussion. In this way competitive sport certainly mirrors the values and perhaps the mood of society. But it can do more. Competitive sport has a unique advantage for moral development over that of other subjects consigned to the classroom. This is not life in abstract, not theoretical, it is a ‘lived’ experience, in real-time, where decisions you make have an immediate, and tangible effect on those around you.

This gives educators and pupils the rare opportunity (and responsibility) to practice and work on moral behaviour, and because, as I have explained, these behaviours *do not* sit in isolation from other communities, they have concrete implications and applications in other spheres of life as well. The biggest issue is that – through a complicated history of use and misuse – competitive sport is generally not conceived in this way, and consequently not considered to have the power to morally educate. A primarily Athenian conception suggests otherwise. By moving away from the obsession with winning, from concerning ourselves only with *outcome* instead of *process*, thinking of *me* instead of *us*, there are tangible moral qualities to discover (and rediscover).

Competition is at the heart of Physical Education, but it need not be so negatively conceived. By shifting our focus away from merely improving the skills of the individual towards a more

moral conception, we open up a world of opportunity, a new type of Physical Education, one which is founded in Greek origins and long-held philosophical traditions. In striving *together* towards the ‘mutual quest for excellence’ (*arête*) we learn respect for persons and respect for ourselves, we also learn that ‘I’ is bound up inextricably with ‘we’ in the ‘ethical community’. Competition is a search for ‘the truth’, and through this process we can hope to understand ourselves and others better, and, crucially, learn along the way, regardless of whether we win or lose. In such an ethical community we can be given the opportunity to be right, to be wrong, and to show courage, humility or anger and learn from such trials, to understand our nature and the nature of others, our greatness, our fallibility, in order to accept complex truths and act less *selfishly* and more *morally*. Conceived in this way, competitive sport would find a moral intention and a new goal, *kalokagathia*, bodily *and* moral excellence and play a much more holistic role in educating society to aim for *eudaimonia*, and to flourish.

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