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# The Philosophy of 'Playing' Games: A Lusory Introspection of the Sincere Player and the Meaning of Play Amidst the Moral Morass of Contemporary Sport

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Kinesiology

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“The Philosophy of ‘Playing’ Games: A Lusory Introspection of the Sincere Player  
and the Meaning of Play Amidst the Moral Morass of Contemporary Sport”

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Justin Rhoden

Graduate Program in Kinesiology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

Play is a fundamental experience embedded within human culture. We all play in some perceptible manner that provides our lives with meaning we don't ordinarily feel from other pursuits that are means-ended. Sport philosophers have depended upon the seminal theories of Huizinga and Caillois to shape their constraints on the play world. Huizinga's and Caillois' definition both use formal analysis to protect the play sphere however, their theories fail in providing justifiable reason to protect the play sphere and the meaning it has. I propose that understanding play from the perspective of existentialism provides a better way to understand its meaning and truly understand how it shapes the understanding of play, games, and sports with the field of the philosophy of sport.

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Thank you Marlon for being the torchbearer and leading the way in our family. My personal precept is taken from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on Self-Reliance, "*Ne te quaesiveris extra*" however knowing you were among the first in our family to complete the long and arduous journey of higher education has given me great comfort and belief in my own abilities to chart my own course.

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## Chapter 1: Towards Lusory Introspection

### 1.1 Introduction

At some point in the long history of humanity's quotidian life, games and sports were conceived forever altering our world. The creation of games and sports may have delivered us from an exclusively functionalist outlook of humanity, thus evolving our position towards concepts more intrinsically meaningful such as 'play.'<sup>1</sup> At what point games and sports were conceived, we cannot be entirely sure, but throughout their extensive genealogy their link to the phenomenological concept of 'play' appears undeniable. The occurrence of play has permeated all of human history; no civilization has ever been free of its influence.<sup>2</sup> Sports and games are the most readily identifiable play forms known to our society, even carving out a special space to be celebrated as such. The exact definitions of play, games, and sports have been unclear. Furthermore, the relationship amongst the combined trio can be especially difficult to grasp. Modern sports and games are celebrated, not the least because they contain important human significance through their connection with the play phenomenon, but they appear to be indistinguishable from one another at times. The diverse natures and structures of games, sports, and play must be defined to develop substantiated philosophical theories concerning the

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation marks a semantic shift from the word's ordinary usage, indicating a conceptual or theoretical meaning different from conventional usage.

<sup>2</sup> Klaus Meier, "An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play," *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*, VII (1980): p. 24.

interrelationships amongst these three concepts, in order to better identify meaning inherent to the activities.<sup>3</sup>

Play, games, and sports are valued human concepts that are interrelated; however, play is the constant that precedes the two social constructions of games and sports, whose definitions, or purpose, have yet to fully crystalize. Bernard Suits describes games and sports as “enterprises or institutions” and play, game, and sport in combination as the “tricky triad.”<sup>4</sup> The cumulative group name derives from the similarities each individual concept shares with the others, creating difficulty in precisely defining them as distinct and independent concepts, especially games and sport. The play element complicates the triad because it can be an integral factor to the two remaining concepts, i.e. ‘game’ and ‘sport,’ that are quite similar. With concepts so ill-defined, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint what a person is doing exactly, when he/she is engaged in sport or a game, and the significance these actions can have. Are they experiencing all three elements of the tricky triad simultaneously, or do they exist in a progressive manner where they can be subsumed sequentially in a sort of continuum? The quest in philosophy of sport, to gain further understanding of these relationships is predicated upon formulating an exact philosophical definition of each component of the tricky triad. This quest may clarify the nebulous relationship between the three concepts, but also

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<sup>3</sup> Klaus Meier, “Triad Trickery: Playing With Sport and Games,” *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*, XV (1988): p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Suits, “Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport,” *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*, XV (1988): p. 1.

determines the boundary for creating a specified scope delimiting each component to its perceived essence.

Play is a fundamental experience embedded in human culture. We all play in some perceptible manner or another, but often it occurs without any sort of recognition. Most of the time, we limit our understanding of play to the world of childish folly, often overlooking its presence in other aspects of our lives traditionally thought to be exclusively serious. It even can also be overlooked in sports and games of contemporary culture, with such high stakes attached to athletic pursuit. Sports and games represent the most obvious link to simple 'play' forms, but with the added complexity introduced by varying degrees of human sophistication. They present a human constructed lens for us to discover life unfettered by our penchant towards the mundane pursuits of societal means-ended functioning, in other words, 'work.' By playing these human constructions, we can realize complete freedom from the societal circumstances that impose an attitude of work that is highly regimented. I believe the structure of sports and games are designed to safeguard the purity of play in a sacred place that is held distinct from the antithetical world of means-ended pursuits. The sport philosopher, Klaus Meier emphasizes the sanctity of play, while divorcing it from the world of means-ended conduct.

Play is not a means to external ends or purposes; it does not further survival, sustenance, pragmatic, or materialistic interests. It is process rather than product oriented. The interest in play is the pursuit of internal values and ends; the reward is in the act. Thus, the prize of play is play itself.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Klaus Meier, "An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play," *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*, VII (1980): p. 25.

Experiencing play is an intrinsic choice by the sport player done simply for the sake of itself and no other. Nevertheless, humanity's infatuation with sport presents a remarkable paradox, since, in most cases, sports involve activities arbitrarily constructed, for no apparent external purpose related to the teleological utility of enlightened practices. Sports are prized greatly within culture because they symbolize a source of freedom that can't be experienced during traditional means-ended activity. They require a wholly different mental attitude that one can only carry intrinsically, separating it from the ordinary world we normally operate in. Meier further suggests, "Any pragmatic culture so heavily oriented toward productive, utilitarian enterprises will view the adult player as irresponsible, and will tolerate play only with suspicion, guarded restraint, and constraints."<sup>6</sup> Sure enough, the means-ended faction suspicious of play described above by Meier has co-opted mainstream sport. The far-reaching influence of this idea of human purpose has fundamentally perverted our collective attitudes towards 'playing' sport. Today, all levels of sport are largely driven by outcomes, results, and benefits. Inevitably this has caused us to lose our way in such a meaningful and honorable endeavor. I intend on producing a vigorous philosophical defense of play in order to once again recognize the value of our play in the face of a fast changing landscape for sport.

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<sup>6</sup> Klaus Meier, "An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play," *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*, VII (1980): p. 27.

## 1.2 Relative Value of Play in all its Manifestations within Society

Klaus Meier, in “An Affair of Flutes” best describes the value of play for the purposes of this study. Humanity is traditionally governed by a means-ended approach to all goal-oriented tasks due of our unique level of reasoning. In Western culture, the reign of the ideology of work gives us highly limited permission to be useless.<sup>7</sup> From the start of humanity’s new beginning in the New World, harsh cruelties have necessitated a means-ended outlook simply for survival. Puritan settlers conceived the attitude described as the ‘Protestant work ethic’ that still persists today.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent generations who subscribe to this work ethic, believe hardworking people are destined for salvation, while the slothful will be condemned to damnation. After all, during the beginning of European settlement of the New World humans lived a barren existence. Now we have reshaped the world to reflect our ingenuity and self-determination through tireless work ensuring our own destiny. Incrementally, the global society has progressed to this point through a continuous work mentality shaped by the Protestant work ethic. The reason for crafting the world in this way, is that it lends to the idea that our collective existence has some sort of greater purpose other than becoming a prisoner of one’s imprudent indulgence in all things *pro tem*; otherwise what deeper meaning could humanity experience beyond the emptiness of a fleeting thrill? Meier suggests that part of human identity is shaped through productivity and work.

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<sup>7</sup> Meier, “An Affair of Flutes,” p. 25

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* p. 25

The construction of a secular version of this code contributed to the increasing acceptance of the assumption that man's expectations and orientation should be framed and nurtured under the category of work and the understanding that he literally manufactures his identity and dignity by his fabrications as a functional entity in the work world.<sup>9</sup>

Humanity's elevated level of reasoning, in addition to the combination of social and self-awareness, might lead one to surmise that our purpose revolves around the creation and advancement of a uniform social veneer used to promote greater levels of productivity, which is best described as civilization. Within a civilized society, various milestones mark the gradual means-ended progression of our species within the practices of politics, architecture, literature, etc. that further distance us from the state of nature forewarned by Hobbes. All of these pursuits have a practical application that contributes incrementally to the edifice of civilization in a rather noticeable way. In spite of this work attitude employed in day-to-day contemporary civilized life, games and sports run contrary to the principled and deliberate means-ended approach. Furthermore, Meier asserts that play allows man to truly exist within the world devoid of the weight and consequence of means-ended thought.

Play may be heralded as a singularly fulfilled, liberating experience, through which man opens doors normally closed, alters his habitual modes of perception, refuses categorically to tolerate premature and limiting closures, views naked simplicity of the world and entities within it, and inaugurates processes and actions of creative and novel transformation.<sup>10</sup>

If games and sport are truly linked to whimsical play, they pose a deep-seated contradiction to our purpose within a purposeful societal structure. Yet,

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<sup>9</sup> Meier, *An Affair of Flutes*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* p.31.

oddly, game and sport completely and utterly captivate a significant space within the civilized socio-cultural sphere. Games and sports are dedicated to being carried out simply for their own sake and not any other, while taking place in a world far removed from the one in which we normally exist. Despite the fact that these diversions don't add any special value to ordinary civilized culture, they are celebrated and cherished as institutions in their own right. Sport as an institution, isn't in keeping with the cultural treasures produced by humanity's typical means-ended approach. It is my belief that such means-ended cultural treasures are celebrated because they embody the ideals central to that specific practice's functional utility while proving to be aesthetically pleasing in a way that is timeless. However, when sport is played in a genuine manner, it possesses similar, if not equal or greater, significance while never approaching the same tangible utility of practices with definite consequences. Coincidentally, watching skilled athletes participating in sport is aesthetically pleasing, and it is no wonder that we have come to find value in it as spectacle first and foremost. Playing sport is one of the greatest paradoxes inherent to our culture when juxtaposed with work mentality as outlined by Meier in "The Affair of Flutes," which I also support. I seek to probe further into Meier's accurate assessment of play and work. Play and work have existed since the point of humanity's beginning, but their recent intersection within newly-treasured contrived play activities such as sports, and games presents an especially peculiar morass, which obscures the timeless meaning inherent to such a simple pursuit.

## 1.3 The Play Paradox

For most theories on play, in particular, those utilized in this study by Huizinga, Caillois, Suits, and Meier, it quickly becomes apparent that games and sports don't really matter in terms of actual consequence because they are dedicated to a world apart. Relative to the means-ended approach that promotes calculated and considered decisions in support of the ordinary attitude, sustained play cannot exist without freedom from oppressive real world conditions. Sustained play could be describe as informal or formal but extending beyond a fleeting moment. Therefore, a clear distinction forms between humanity's practical focus and the superfluous nature of play. Nonetheless, spirited competition is the characteristic most common to the participants in games and sports, essentially conducting themselves as if it were the only matter of any importance within the span of that moment. For some, sports do matter, and such intense focus on the frivolous appears to some others, to be a gross misunderstanding of one's priorities. This phenomena is not unique to frolicking youth unconcerned with the burden of responsibility, but is shared by the non-varsity college student, the weekend bowler, the middle-aged person training simply to attempt to complete a marathon, and even the senior citizen playing checkers. Sports and games are a significant aspect of the lives of all sorts of people, because we love to revel in the play phenomenon. All of the activities above share similar characteristics but certainly are not identical. These opportunities are normally considered pursuits that provide peoples' lives with significant meaning. Following the player's participation a peculiar feeling of fulfillment engulfs them; however, such feelings of fulfillment typically require accomplishment. Each contest

has a winner and a loser. Most participants don't win the tournaments they are involved in. They could be viewed as having squandered precious time they could have used to go about the business of accomplishing more practical endeavors instrumental to humanity's continued means-ended progression. Despite the discord between the deep meaningfulness of a player's participation and the activity's purposelessness, the meaning of the moment persists long after its end, enduring within the player. Sports can't be evaluated using the same cost-benefit criteria traditionally used to determine material value in our lives, the existential meaning of game-play experienced by the true player is just too great. Ultimately, the irony of the true player signifies a paradox bordering upon the absurd.

For the overwhelming minority, their participation in sport begets external value when classified as a professional. They retain the single tangible link connecting games and sport to the ordinary means-ended functioning world. The majority of people engage in games and sports without receiving extrinsic rewards as a result of their efforts. With this being the case, from a logical perspective, our behavior in activities so absurd is quite curious, especially upon considering that our human faculties are guided by purposive action. Why engage in sport if you are not guaranteed to be compensated like you ordinarily would for achieving other goal-oriented activity? Are playing games and sports for their own sake simply a waste of time? It all seems illogical and confounding when considering our normative means-ended outlook. Therefore, such questions warrant closer scrutiny of the lasting existential meaning the player experiences while at play. This poses a fundamental contrast with the underlying structural difference of contemporary

elite/professional sports. These pursuits seemingly forsake the play mentality in sports, modifying it to a novel work approach. It is my assertion that when contemporary sport follows this paradigm it creates an unintended moral morass due to the player's attitudinal perversion. Within the structure of contemporary hyper-competitive sport, it ceases to retain any sort of personal meaning when conducted *ad libitum*. Contemporary sport is no longer self-fulfilling from a standpoint of choosing sport as mechanism to find meaning or purpose in one's life. The attitude of work, and means-ended calculation, has infiltrated contemporary sport imposing an external purpose that our society believes is inherent to humanity, into something that has no greater purpose beyond itself.

This critical review can make one question and reflect back to the countless blocks of time spent playing these seemingly foolish games we have constructed. Have we wasted the better part of our youth by not working? In retrospect my participation in sports seems illogical when I consider the alternate opportunities along other paths I declined to explore. Nevertheless, I can't deny the meaningful memories had memories when I scored my first touchdown, or every time I experience a satisfying exchange of a well-played tennis rally, or when I dunked the basketball for the first time during the course of a game.<sup>11</sup> Equally important, are the lasting memories of lessons learned following bitter failure. With each memory my heart swells with pride, overriding the logical faculties that tell me what I'm doing isn't that important in the grand scheme of things. The meaningfulness experienced by the player speaks to the existential component of games and sport

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<sup>11</sup> As a caveat, part of this essay will be through an interpretation of the author's own experience 'playing.'

that connect us all. As Albert Camus perfectly encapsulated sport's universalizability, "After many years during which I saw many things, what I know most surely about morality and the duty of man I owe to sport."<sup>12</sup>

## 1.4 Meaning through the Existential View

Some forms of existential absurdum suggest we live in a purposeless, chaotic universe, which is inherently meaningless.<sup>13</sup> According to the existential philosophy of Albert Camus, the absurd dictates that no meaning can be found in the world beyond the individual meaning we provide it. For meaning to come to pass, the existential philosophy of Sartre states that a human agent's, "existence precedes essence."<sup>14</sup> Sartre's maxim diverges from the ancient Greek philosophy of Aristotle who believed a thing's essence translated to its intended purpose. It has been from Aristotle's function argument where our Western attitudes about humanity and purpose were originally formed.<sup>15</sup> Sartre's famous assertion is essentially proposing that human beings begin from a point similar to John Locke's<sup>16</sup> concept of *tabula*

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<sup>12</sup> Brian Cronin, "Stupid, Absurd Sports," *The Harvard Crimson*. (2012, April 19<sup>th</sup>). Retrieved from <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2012/4/19/harvard-sports-are-stupid/>

<sup>13</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Albert Camus," Last Updated (2011, Oct 27<sup>th</sup>). Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/camus/>

<sup>14</sup> Walter Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre. (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 289.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, trans. William David Ross (Oxford: University Press, 2009) p. 10

<sup>16</sup> John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. (Toronto: Penguin Books Ltd, 1997)

*rasa*.<sup>17</sup> This leads to the suggestion that humanity simply exists prior to any concepts of values or ethics. Therefore the position is that humanity can't have altruistic values or universal ethics that are not acquired or developed e.g. (The Lord of the Flies).<sup>18</sup> With no accepted criteria of what constitutes a human being's essence, no definition exists as to what it means to be human. It is then incumbent upon every individual to fulfill their existence by choosing their own meaningful essence. Accordingly, a human being realizes their essence by the conscious choices they make in order to shape concepts like values and ethics. On this account, it is solely through the process of living that one defines one's self. However, exclusively dedicating oneself to becoming the greatest ball-player misses the point of 'playing.' Play should be considered an excellent compliment, but shaping the entirety of one's essence around game seems to be a gross misunderstanding of the concept's trivial nature. The aforementioned meaning experienced by the player derives from the freedom to determine their essence by the means of their most basic form of existence in the form of their own body. To apply this concept to play, the meaning felt by the player revolves around choice and freedom, concepts epitomizing the idea of existence. To use one's body and mind only in a way to seek some further instrumental good, is in itself a choice of how to live life. Further, on this account, the genuine player's choice is superior to the instrumental participant because the choice is made for a good determined by one's self and not by, or for, any external factor.

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<sup>17</sup> Latin phrase, which translates to, scraped tablet, which implies blank slate especially when referring to birth or infancy.

<sup>18</sup> William Golding, The Lord of the Flies. (Great Britain: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1954)

In other words, the game-player's play possesses self-defining meaning that is not conditional to the player's surroundings, but exists unconditionally in their heart. If we are to accept this as being true, then it becomes crucial to examine the constitution of sports, games, and play to understand what we are truly doing.

## 1.5 Importance of 'Playing' Sport

In order to truly pinpoint the essence of sports and games, the appropriate point of entry into philosophy of sport involves questions about the nature of sport and its relation to the concept of play that precedes it.<sup>19</sup> For, when we examine the examples cited above, what are they doing if there isn't a teleological purpose to sport? Normally games are considered as being reserved for childish folly, but the seriousness attributed to sports by the spirited player proves this to be not always accurate. 'Play' has been identified as a central pillar to the field of research in sport philosophy. Beginning with Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture, sport philosophers have been forced to define the practice of games and sports, while recognizing they are grounded within the greater domain of play. Huizinga unearths elements of play within all facets of human culture, which leads him to conclude that play is primary to cultural development, especially

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<sup>19</sup> Randolph Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2004) p. 4.

sports. Play transcends that of which is purely physical or purely biological activity, carrying out a significant function, which suggests there is some sense to it.<sup>20</sup>

In Western Culture, the inception of the analysis of 'play' begins with Huizinga's demonstration of its centrality to the development of culture. 'Play' theory has been one of the anchors sport philosophers use in defining and distinguishing between the activities of mere play, games, and sport. One goal was that with a clear understanding of this interrelationship they could provide a coherent answer to the question of what constitutes sport? Thereby precisely delimiting what sport is, so it can be distinguished from the idea of a game, and account for the continuing influence of play within sport. Play in human culture has an undeniable relation to sport and games, but poses conceptual problems with the paradigm used to understand our contemporary sporting environment. Sport is multi-faceted and ever changing, proven by its wide range from tee-ball leagues for children, to ultra competitive professional sports leagues. Certainly, the participation of Ken Griffey Jr. differs from that of little Suzy participating in afterschool tee-ball. In the examples cited above, both could chose to *play* for the simple pleasure gained, but their respective play environments drastically differ because of the differences in our contemporary sporting range. Our modern gaming and sporting environment now champion professional performances and various other compensation in some fashion, as the predominate idea of these derivative play forms. Contemporary sports have etched a special place in our culture of which most are quite fond. As a result, fanatical attitudes have matured into the sport

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<sup>20</sup> Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture. (Hunt, Barnard and Co., LTD: London and Axlebury, 1944) p. 4.

industrial complex that has fused commercialism with sport, producing better athletic theatre than yesteryear. What is most ironic about this combination of sport and commercialism is the linkage of ordinary means-ended approach to the whimsical and playful sport concept bereft of any ordinary desires like money. Right or wrong, athletic performance was inevitably going to be harnessed for commercial gain because sport's beauty is so obvious to onlookers familiar and ignorant alike. The contemporary sporting structure again begs the question of definition and relation. Modern sport's tenuous link to play seems especially pronounced nowadays. Huizinga suggests the following toward the end of Homo Ludens when discussing the death of play.

In the case of contemporary sport we have an activity nominally known as play but raised to such a pitch of technical organization and scientific thoroughness that the real play-spirit is threatened with extinction.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship play has to contemporary sport has been fundamentally perverted due to its association with work-like approaches. A huge shift has occurred in the way we understand sport from the play mentality. No longer is play done for its own sake. Sport is primarily practiced and performed in a manner resembling play, but is no longer truly free without a genuine play attitude. Sport was once considered to be a fatuous undertaking reserved for youth. However this idea has flipped on its head and our understanding of sport is being shaped from the perverted and commodified contemporary form, essentially ceasing as play. The attitude guiding participation is virtually unrelated to the lusory mentality that resembles the simplest forms of play. Freedom and choice are so crucial to play,

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<sup>21</sup> Huizinga, p. 199.

however, these concepts can only add to the self-meaning the true player experiences, if contemporary sport is consciously chosen as a pursuit independent of any other good, which for the most part, it appears not to be. The word amateur is primarily used to describe such a person, but as Schneider describes the definition of “no paid sport” presents logical troubles.<sup>22</sup> Schneider proposes a positive definition of amateurism that supports the autotelic and playful qualities in favor of means-ended conduct typically exhibited in high performance sport.

## 1.6 Methodology

One major concern of this study is the lusory introspection of the athlete. This will be achieved by examining three aspects of ‘play’ within sport philosophy. First, the exact progression of our understanding of ‘play’ within the field sport philosophy following the seminal anthropological and sociological accounts of ‘play’ identified by Huizinga and Caillois will be reviewed. Second, a critical analysis of the varying definitions of what constitutes ‘play’ in sport put forth by relevant sport philosophers will be examined. Last, an examination of the consequences arising from our current understanding of these definitions, relative to the contemporary sporting context involving the sport industrial complex, will be presented. This lusory introspection uses the framework of accepted definitional concepts of ‘play’ in order to decipher and understand meaning and significance of how we achieve self-actualization through sport. My quest will use philosophy of sport to explore the existential meaning and significance of what it means to sincerely ‘play’ sport

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<sup>22</sup> Angela Schneider, “For the Love of the Game: A Philosophical Defense of Amateurism,” *Quest*, No. 45, (4), (1993): p. 462

while simultaneously navigating the obstacles of one's own embodiment, the world, and the human condition.

In order to produce a well-organized account of a subject so broad I intend to separate the literature into three distinct areas. I will begin with the origin of play characteristics proposed by Huizinga and Caillois through their respective anthropological and sociological accounts of the concept. Here, play will be reduced to the essential characteristics that define its application in the modern sporting context. From this perspective we can begin to explore the element of absurdity that is seemingly inherent 'to play' when contrasted with concepts of means-ended work. This contrast will allow us to identify the meaning of play and its impact on our views of sport and game. I will then turn my attention to the research literature that attempts to distinguish and define the essence of games and sports, alongside their relationship with play. The works of Bernard Suits and Ludwig Wittgenstein will be utilized in attempt to focus on the conceptual analysis of the true structural framework of games. From this framework we can try to decide on the structural identity of games and sport, which seem at least initially, virtually identical in makeup. This provides the framework to determine how the nature of sport as concept shape normative values of the practice, while demonstrating the added contribution of 'play' to the inherent meaning of the activity. Last, the works of Klaus Meier and Bernard Suits along with other notable sport philosophers engaged in a protracted debate over the precise nature of the tricky triad will be reviewed. What counts as sport, games, and play might seem to be a simple debate of opinion for the outsider, but it is of principal importance to the philosopher seeking an

introspective understanding of the true player's lusory nature. Without attempting to delimit a general concept to a more specific definition, it is impossible to prescribe what could be good, and proscribe what is bad. On one level, the moral dimension of sports and games exist because of how we define these practices, which in turn, influences the decorum and conduct one must demonstrate to be engaged in them. It becomes impossible to attempt moral evaluation without a more precise definition of the essence of them. Therefore, with more definitional clarity we can better understand the existential meaning experienced by pure players, and further explore the incongruence of the modern sporting environment that often abandons the cherished meaning of the 'play' concept.

## Chapter 2: Historical and Sociological Genealogies of Play

### 2.1 Huizinga

Johan Huizinga is among the several esteemed scholars who have published research examining play theory. Although Huizinga was not the first to recognize the value of play in explaining human behavior, he is the first scholar in the Western world, to attempt an exact definition of play and of the various ways it manifests itself in all spheres of culture, the arts, philosophy, politics, and even legal institutions and warfare.<sup>23</sup> As a cultural historian, Huizinga was primarily concerned with answering the theoretical question of what constitutes culture, how and why specific cultures come into being and pass away, how and why they sustain or fail to sustain themselves, and whether a historian is able to grasp their configurations.<sup>24</sup> Upon considering his cultural research from a macro perspective, Huizinga arrived at the conclusion of viewing “man” and culture as *sub specie ludi*.<sup>25</sup> Homo Ludens is not the study of play as one of several human processes, but demonstrates the morphology of play as a phenomenon that precedes and drives cultural progress. Huizinga’s historical research becomes valuable due the precise definition he constructs about play through its cultural manifestations.

Huizinga’s initial chapter on the nature and significance of play achieves the first workable definition of the play phenomenon. It must be pointed out that Huizinga refers to the generic concept of play in an attempt to refine his definition.

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Anchor, “History and Play: Johan Huizinga and his Critics,” *History and Theory*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (1978): p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>Anchor, p. 64.

<sup>25</sup>From Latin translation: under the aspect of play.

Fittingly, he identifies play as not being restricted to human beings, after demonstrating that playful behavior can be observed in animals as well. This observation led him to determine that play is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or psychological reflex.<sup>26</sup> Play surpasses the boundary of purely biological activity and should be understood as a significant function, which takes on greater meaning for humans as it grows in sophistication.<sup>27</sup> Huizinga determined that the significance of play revolves around its status as a phenomenon, and this new explanation for play weakened the logic upholding previous biological accounts rendering them untenable.<sup>28</sup> Prior to the current philosophical study of play, it was assessed from the perspective of psychology and physiology. According to Huizinga, these disciplines are steeped in the scientific method of observation and variable manipulation in order to isolate the cause that can serve as the basis for logical explanation of the science.<sup>29</sup> The scientific notion of play is profoundly flawed because the scientific outlook presupposes a general biological function, which is not the case with play. Huizinga recounts the multitude of biological suppositions used to rationalize play such as the discharge of superabundant energy, imitative instinct, preparatory simulation for maturity, and the need for relaxation or distraction.<sup>30</sup> These beliefs don't support the idea of play as a self-serving concept distinct from regular means-end activity. The accounts of play justifying a biological purpose ultimately lead to conceptual problems since this rationale doesn't

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<sup>26</sup> Huizinga, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* p. 2

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* p. 2

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* p. 2

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* p. 2

determine the true essence of play according to Huizinga, but at best might describe its possible benefits. According to Huizinga, early scientific accounts of play were doomed to fail at the outset because they assume a logical connection between play activity and biological purpose that is not necessarily the case.<sup>31</sup>

Huizinga charts a new course and directs his attention to the aesthetic phenomenon of play. Play captivates a certain level of attention both from the player and potential spectators surrounding the activity. Normally the activity carries a certain noticeable pleasure, possibly even electricity that is palpable for those involved allowing them to become lost in the moment. The phenomenal property of play is the backbone supporting Huizinga's definition. Previous researchers on the subject steeped in scientific methodology couldn't acknowledge this aspect because it transcends scientific analysis. Huizinga defends the phenomenal account of play by stating, "Yet in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play."<sup>32</sup> Huizinga's phenomenal account of play can't be subject to scientific scrutiny, and can't be reduced to fit another category of human process, because it is its own end according to Huizinga. Huizinga certifies his point about play's phenomenal nature by again invoking the example of animals at play suggesting, "The reality of play extends beyond the sphere of human life and it cannot have its foundations in any rational nexus, because this would limit it to mankind."<sup>33</sup> With the departure from rational sensibilities, play contains a decided illogicality, especially for human kind.

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<sup>31</sup>Huizinga, p .2.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid* p. 3

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid* p. 3

I agree with Huizinga regarding the misapplication of scientific analysis when studying play for all reasons stated above. Play is very much a phenomenon better studied through the refinement of a theoretical definition. A definition can always be used to delimit a particular phenomenon, however science cannot accurately grasp the nonsensical nature of the activity. External standards cannot make sense of the conduct, and this is precisely the reason that play is a self-predicable concept for Huizinga. Therefore biological accounts of play can't suffice as a definition because science can't conceive of this elusive self-serving nature inherent within play, especially since it doesn't contribute to any psychological or biological end.<sup>34</sup> Upon understanding play as a distinct, fundamental, supra-logical concept, Huizinga begins constructing a definition determined by five characteristics.

For play to occur it must be non-serious in order to escape the determinism of the universal order. By suggesting this non-serious nature for the activity Huizinga is not requiring an attitude of complete levity. However, the agent can't approach play with the sense of seriousness one would normally exhibit otherwise in the means-ended activity found in ordinary life. This is quite different than the greater standard of "not serious" because anyone can attest that play can be taken very seriously upon witnessing the run-of-the-mill schoolyard populated with children playing earnestly in order to complete the game within the window of a brief recess. Therefore, the qualification of "non"(serious) eliminates the conceptual difficulties involved with a completely frivolous outlook, while not progressing to

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<sup>34</sup>Huizinga, p. 3.

the complete opposite end of the spectrum of complete and utter seriousness.<sup>35</sup> There is a balance point that, it could be suggested, is analogous to the theory of the golden mean posited by Aristotle which states, a virtue is the balance point between deficiency and excess.<sup>36</sup> Upon establishing a foundation of play grounded in non-seriousness Huizinga provides the characteristics that define play. Prior to proposing his definition, he forwards an important caveat in order to limit the broad scope of the play concept. Huizinga seeks to examine play in relation to culture; therefore he need not scrutinize all the forms of play, as he is only concerned with its sociocultural manifestations. Herein, Huizinga makes an important distinction by identifying that play exists in sophisticated and primitive forms. Sophisticated forms of play that manifest in our social environment are at Huizinga's delimitations of play. Primitive forms of play exist outside the realm of cultural history; therefore Huizinga is justified in excluding it from his analysis. Nevertheless, he acknowledges primitive play exists, providing greater credence to his comprehensive navigation of this previously uncharted element of the human experience.

The first principal aspect of play is the voluntary nature of it.<sup>37</sup> Play cannot continue to be defined as so, if the agent is participating involuntarily or is subject to direction. Play should be considered nonessential, and its meaning derives from the potential enjoyment of voluntarily choosing it. Thus, play cannot be mandated outside of the solemn cultural functions Huizinga identifies, and can be stopped by

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<sup>35</sup> Huizinga p. 5

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. William David Ross (Oxford: University Press, 2009) p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* p. 7

the agent at any point because one chooses to be involved. Ultimately, for Huizinga, play can be considered akin to the overall idea of freedom, because it represents the acme of liberal activity. With respect to this characteristic I wholeheartedly agree with Huizinga and would like to emphasize its importance for the purposes of my argument. The voluntary nature of play relates back to absurdum in existential philosophy that suggests our lives have no inherent meaning. Therefore, any possible meaning in our lives must be chosen voluntarily otherwise it isn't a demonstration of our free will. I'm unwilling to accept that extraneous inducements beyond the realm of play are acceptable to the amateur<sup>38</sup> player. They don't represent a coercive force requiring the player to take action, but they do impede making a choice for something, in and of its own good, independent of another. For the pursuit to bear the fruit of deep personal meaning it can't be chosen for any reason beyond that of intrinsic fulfillment. The ability to exercise free will because of our special cognitive gifts doesn't necessitate that work be our central purpose. Finding meaning from self-actualization in a pursuit significant to the individual is central to those who are truly free. Work for its own sake is bondage, but play exists throughout all facets of our civilization for people to exercise complete freedom. Huizinga discovered play under nearly every rock in the social landscape.<sup>39</sup> It's simply ironic that something so ordinarily insignificant as sport can unshackle a person and give them ultimate freedom if it is chosen for the right reasons.

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard Suits, "Words on Play," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. IV (1977): p. 117.

Huizinga's second characteristic describes the concept of the magic circle, quite possibly the most famous and distinguishing feature of play. Play is distinct and separate from ordinary life, existing in a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own according to Huizinga. This distinct sphere where play occurs is fundamentally dependent upon the non-serious requirement integral to play. Play and seriousness exist as polar opposites in Huizinga's understanding of play. In order to enter the play sphere the agent must suspend ordinary seriousness, only to be reawakened the traditional means-ended outlook upon play's termination. Play exists within everyday life; however it is distinct from ordinary life, since it occurs in its own time place. This characteristic is best understood by the pretend nature of the play activity, for example consider the childhood game 'Cops and Robbers.' It is obvious to anyone witnessing such childish tomfoolery that the participants are only pretending, but internally they consider themselves to be as cunning as John Dillinger while matched with the resolve of a Melvin Purvis. The pretend quality of play doesn't preclude them from possible serious involvement within play, but pretending betrays a consciousness of the inferiority of play compared with ordinary seriousness, a feeling that seems to be something as primary as play itself.<sup>40</sup>

Play is not subjected to the confines of ordinary life, it exists beyond the immediate satisfaction of natural wants and appetites. It interrupts the normal human appetitive process of means-ended behavior. Play becomes the interlude

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<sup>40</sup> Huizinga, p. 8

within quotidian life.<sup>41</sup> Play is incorporated within our lives; however it serves no purpose beyond itself. The beauty of it, as alluded to earlier in the introduction, is that it begins as an amusement or distraction; however, it becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general.<sup>42</sup> Without play we cease to possess the glimmer that enrich our very souls.

Huizinga's third point completes the distinct magic circle concept, by asserting that play not only exists in a separate region from ordinary life but also temporal period. The magic circle concept has play occurring in a distinct time and place, withdrawn from the ordinary possessing its own progression and meaning. The magic circle is a name for this abstract consecrated setting where play occurs separate from the ordinary. An apt example of this is Sanford stadium on the campus of the University of Georgia, where supporters unintentionally illustrate the separation of the magic circle by using a particularly apropos expression. In reference to the ornamental privet hedge bordering the stadium playing field, the Georgia football team play's its home games "Between the Hedges."<sup>43</sup> Within the stadium, a perimeter of privet hedges surrounds the field demarcating the consecrated football field from the other. The passion of play unfolds within the enclosure of the hedges spawning a temporary world encapsulated by the looming presence of the ordinary world of the university's campus. Georgia football zealots constantly refer to the metonym as opposed to the stadium's proper name,

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<sup>41</sup> Huizinga, p. 8

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* p. 9

<sup>43</sup> Bill King, "What Could Make a Day Between the Hedges Even Better for UGA Fans," *Atlanta Journal of Constitution*. (June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013) Retrieved from <http://blogs.ajc.com/junkyard-blawg/2013/06/15/what-could-make-a-day-between-the-hedges-even-better-for-uga-fans/>

implicitly acknowledging and celebrating the preeminence of the “magic circle dedicated to the performance of an act apart.”<sup>44</sup> Within the confines of the magic circle new meaning is infused within those playing because the world they inhabit is completely detached from the nonplaying world, yet enveloped by it. This is largely attributed to Huizinga’s fourth point of play’s absolute and peculiar order.<sup>45</sup> For play to occur in the sophisticated cultural spheres Huizinga identifies that play demands absolute order. Ordinary life is full of confusion and uncertainty, while play institutes a temporary limited type of perfection brought about by the harmony of adhering to an overarching rule structure. The rules that sanction play are sacrosanct, allowing for the maintenance of the play sphere operating from a new point of consciousness. This new cosmos enchants the player because the institution of rules places the ultimate goal achievement at risk, providing tension that the player must overcome by achieving an objective. Although play transcends the evaluative moral critiques of “good or bad,” “right or wrong,” an ethical aspect emerges from the player’s motivation to relieve the tension within the contest by achieving the objective while complying with the rules. The rules are essential to the continued maintenance of the play-concept’s order. Without rules, play is robbed of its harmonious perfectibility, and ceases to exist. The play world is fragile and the play community can be robbed of the play illusion by a simple transgression of the tenets upholding its constitution. Therefore, the ideal player acknowledges the order of the play world by way of the rules, but doesn’t view them as hindrance but something to be embraced because it is the essence of the endeavor.

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<sup>44</sup> Huizinga, p. 10

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* p. 10

Finally, Huizinga's last characteristic of play derives from the idea that play is completely self-serving.<sup>46</sup> With the initiation and existence of the play world, completely divorced from the ordinary pleasures serving our normal appetitive process become suspended, and are inconsequential within the play world. Play begins and ends with itself, producing nothing beyond itself. Upon the termination of the play sphere, one can seek to satisfy these natural processes, but the play world can't contribute to external material gain from the ordinary world.

By combining the essential characteristics of play outlined, Huizinga provides the first scholarly definition of the play concept,

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.<sup>47</sup>

Upon equipping us with the general definition of play, Huizinga sets out to demonstrate how play manifests itself within specific segments of our culture in the form of competition or agonistic struggle. Among Huizinga's best examples is the play form in philosophy itself. He recounts back to the days of antiquity and the reverence paid to the sophist of the period, specifically citing the famed Protagoras.<sup>48</sup> The sophist's principal goal was to demonstrate exceptional knowledge, while overcoming the objections of their interlocutor in the dialectic. The truth need not be central to the sophist's purpose unlike the genuine

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<sup>46</sup> Huizinga, p. 21

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* p. 13

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* p. 147

philosopher. Plato condemned sophists for using deceitful and misleading rhetorical tricks to manipulate others into accepting fallacious arguments.<sup>49</sup> The rejection of sophistry did not bring about the end of play within philosophy. Philosophy maintains playful features due to its nature as a contest, despite pursuing gravely serious questions concerning things like the essence of truth, epistemology, and morality. The Socratic method, a staple in the corpus of Platonic dialogues perfectly encapsulates what Huizinga describes as, “ancient philosophy’s close association with play in the form of contest.”<sup>50</sup> Philosophical thought arises in a competitive process of the dialectal method governed by the rule and order of factual truths derived from the refinement of logical truth between the interlocutors. The play element is relevant in ancient philosophy because in the case of Protagoras, he operates outside of the supreme order of truth seeking; therefore, he doesn’t practice philosophy.<sup>51</sup> In order for the play element to exist, the sophist must disregard his roundabout rhetoric used to win the argument because the magic circle that fosters play in the form of philosophy occurs as a contest and can’t proceed without the interlocutors advancing what they understand to be a factual truth.<sup>52</sup> While philosophy is not mere ‘play,’ it has nonetheless preserved playful characteristics.

Homo Ludens concludes with a chapter that specifically evaluates the sporting aspect of play. Huizinga expresses a dreary outlook on the modern sporting conception of the play element, possibly coming to the conclusion that our

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<sup>49</sup> Huizinga, p. 148

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid* p. 152

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid* p. 147

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* p. 148

contemporary culture marks the death of play as a phenomenon that breeds and evolves culture.<sup>53</sup> According to Huizinga, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century marks the period where sport transitions from occasional amusement to the system of organized clubs and matches. During this period, England became the cradle of modern sporting life with increased systemization and regimentation for physical activity, robbing sport of its pure play-quality.<sup>54</sup> Huizinga perceives that the disparate terms, 'professional' and 'amateur,' originating from this period, perfectly capture the idea of play's termination, because it no longer possesses elements of non-seriousness and freedom. This sort of classification system of ranking participants suggests a hierarchy that considers sport means-ended. Distinguishing between the two approaches marks out those for whom playing is no longer play, ranking them inferior to the true players in standing, but superior in performance of task.<sup>55</sup> Sport ceases to be play if approached from a serious manner, as Huizinga has noted, play is essentially non-serious. This is the primary difficulty with the modern sports occurring during the inter war years when Homo Ludens was written, which pales in comparison to the contemporary standards that treat sport as being about life or death. Ultimately, the play concept is at deep conflict within the modern sporting culture that confuses the nature of seriousness. Within sport we have an activity nominally known as play, but raised to such a pitch of technical organization and scientific thoroughness that the real play spirit is threatened with extinction.<sup>56</sup>

Professional sports often retain elements such as spirited competition, commitment

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<sup>53</sup> Huizinga, p. 196

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* p. 197

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* p. 196

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* p. 199

to excellence, and teamwork. However this all occurs within the structure of a performance with some spontaneous elements.

Huizinga depicts contemporary civilization as one in which material interests, cynicism, and the negation of every norm not only exists (as they always have), but are elevated into absolutes in place of the rules that underlie all play, all noble activity, and all honorable competition. The decadence of play is evident in the breakdown of the distinction between play and seriousness, whereby the serious business of life politics, war, economics, and morality degenerate into pseudo-play, and play loses its indispensable qualities of spontaneity, detachment, joy, and thus, its power to act as a culture-creating activity. The decadence of play is evident also in the commercialization, professionalization, and politicization of sport, which perverts recreation and reduces it to crude sensationalism. Today we celebrate the dramatic and extraordinary elements of sport. The technical nuance and appreciation for minute skill has vanished, only to be replaced by an insatiable appetite for spectacular performance. It is evident in the perversion of culture by puerilism, which, for Huizinga, instead of making boys into men, adapts the conduct of the community to that of the adolescent age.<sup>57</sup> All of this, Huizinga concludes, clearly shows that there can be no civilization without play and rules of fair play, without conventions consciously established and voluntarily adhered to, and without knowledge of how to win and lose graciously. The supreme importance to civilization of the play factor is precisely that, "Civilization presupposes limitation and mastery of the self, the ability not to confuse its own tendencies with the

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<sup>57</sup> Huizinga, p. 202

ultimate and highest goal, but to understand that it is enclosed within certain bounds freely accepted."<sup>58</sup>

Huizinga's purpose is not sport-centered, in fact he seems rather unconcerned with sport or its close relative, 'game.' Huizinga uses the occasional sport example up until his last chapter to elucidate his definition of play, but he doesn't pursue identifying the interrelationship of what became labeled play, game, and sport because it is beyond the scope of his purpose. The significance of Huizinga's Homo Ludens is his definition of play. Nonetheless, he seems to stumble into the space where play and games intersect, but they are proven to be distinct as pointed out by Carlson later in this section.

## 2.2 Caillois

Roger Caillois' account of play in his book Man, Play and Games is a direct response to what he considers the definitional shortcomings of Huizinga's Homo Ludens, while examining play through a sociological lens. Caillois draws conclusions that are quite similar to Huizinga, in regard to the definition of play and the characteristics that support it. While Caillois acknowledges the importance of his predecessor's thesis linking cultural development to exploration of the play element, he correctly reasons that Huizinga left much of the play concept unexplored.<sup>59</sup> Caillois charts a different path, seeking a comprehensive definition of the play concept in consideration of all its variations and applications for humanity.

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<sup>58</sup> Huizinga, p. 211

<sup>59</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash. (The Free Press of Glencoe Inc. Great Britain, 1961), p. 4

Huizinga discovers play in non-traditional areas we wouldn't normally consider throughout *Home Ludens*, but his general view on play seems to be influenced most by the competitive contest. He further refines Huizinga's original definition, while further expanding the sphere of play by introducing his typology of games and cementing their relationship to play.<sup>60</sup> Caillois immediately begins to address the inadequacies of *Homo Ludens*, most principally Huizinga's omission of games in relation to his understanding of the play element. However, he recognizes the scope of Huizinga's research precluded him from exploring this aspect of play similarly present in games, because his focus rested on the generation and spawning of cultural practices through play. The first section of *Man, Play, and Games* is dedicated to refining Huizinga's original definition and classifying the different types of play occurring. This section of his book on the definition of play is the primary focus of this paper; however, it is not concerned with sociological theory that Caillois delves into towards the second half of the book. As a sport philosopher, the brunt of my focus will be on the clarity of Caillois progression in formulating a correct definition, and its possible utility for achieving my research goal.

Caillois begins by unveiling reworked definitional characteristics similar to Huizinga's original definition of play. He, too, agrees that play is first and foremost a free and voluntary activity considered as a source of joy and amusement.<sup>61</sup> According to Caillois who followed in the wake of Huizinga, the player must be able to choose participation freely and terminate play at any point he desires, because it

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<sup>60</sup> Caillois, p. 12

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* p. 6

only serves as a diversion to escape quotidian life.<sup>62</sup> The free activity described occurs within Huizinga's protected space described as the magic circle. The game's domain is therefore a restricted, closed, protected universe: a pure space.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the rules provide play with intrinsic value because they are unique to the magic circle. Caillois adds to this idea by suggesting that ordinary laws become suspended in favor of new laws unique to the magic circle that are singularly enforced. These elements of the definition of play are holdovers from Huizinga, but Caillois institutes three changes to the characteristics in order to give his account of play.

First, Caillois points out Huizinga incorrectly asserts that play is uninvolved with material profit or gain.<sup>64</sup> Huizinga doesn't subscribe to the idea of betting games, and those of chance, belonging to the realm of play, as he suggests play involves no material interest.<sup>65</sup> Caillois reasons that the casino dealer doesn't play in games of chance; however the tension felt by the casino players as they passively await the resolution of an uncertain situation represents the capriciousness of chance that constitutes just another type of game.<sup>66</sup> According to Caillois, property can be exchanged among the players in a zero sum game, but his view of games seems heavily influenced by the perspective of ordinary work aiming for production.<sup>67</sup> Caillois suggests no external goods are generated as result of participation, which demonstrates his inclination towards comparing the play world

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<sup>62</sup> Caillois, p. 6

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid* p. 7

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* p. 5

<sup>65</sup> Huizinga, p. 13

<sup>66</sup> Caillois, p. 17

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* p. 5

with the ordinary means-ended world. Therefore, this example leads Caillois to characterize play as an occasion of pure waste, in the sense that it represents the passing of productive time that doesn't yield fruit.<sup>68</sup> Since Huizinga regards play as incompatible with profit or the gaining of material interests, there is no room for games of chance in his definition of play. Caillois seeks to remedy the problem of material inducements by arguing that while play has to be unproductive, it need not preclude the players from exchanging property or wealth with one another.<sup>69</sup> The goal of play cannot be to produce anything external to the play sphere such as money, but they still may fully experience the characteristics that circumscribe play if limited transfer while forbidding production of entirely new external benefits. The players' attitudes, if they are indeed playing must reflect this attitude, otherwise they are involved in something else that is not play. Caillois' tenet mandating the absence of external goods serves to exclude professional players from playing. Caillois' definition creates a dichotomous relationship between play and extrinsic reward that is irreconcilable. Caillois considers play as sort of zero-sum game. There is no productive value at all when playing, hence the idea of pure waste, or an unproductive nature, relative to the ordinary means-ended approach. Play is something that is a good in itself. It has internal goods that are the primary reason for participating and engaging in the play. But this does not exclude the possibility of external factors playing a part in conjunction with the intrinsic nature of the activity. Many things can both be goods-in-themselves while at the same time still being constitutive of other goods. Huizinga's requirement of play's intrinsic exclusivity, or

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<sup>68</sup> Caillois, p. 5

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid* p. 5

the complete corruptive nature external goods have on the intrinsic seems erroneous and unwarranted. External elements can exist within play as Caillois rightly posits; however, his error rests in the play world's relative comparison to means-ended work production.

Second, Caillois proposes that play possesses a fictive component that can stand in place of the traditional rule order previously mentioned by Huizinga that protects and maintains the magic circle. Where Huizinga only gives primitive play a cursory overview, Caillois focuses on this type of play, further expanding the range of the play concept. Primitive play doesn't necessarily subscribe to rules; therefore it is the freest form of spontaneous play usually in the form of improvisation.<sup>70</sup> The absence of binding rules in games like 'cops and robbers' requires affirmation of a fictive play element in order to maintain the play sphere. For Caillois the fictive element in primitive play serves the same purpose of rule order. This awareness of basic the unreality of the assumed behavior is separate from real life and from the arbitrary legislation that defines other games.<sup>71</sup> Failing to acknowledge this awareness quashes the play illusion, returning the player back to the ordinary.<sup>72</sup> Caillois effectively points out play isn't subject to rule order and fiction to maintain the magic circle, it is either ruled ordered or fictitious.

Last, there is a source of uncertainty inherent to play. This is similar to Huizinga's concept of tension but more accurately defined. Consider for example the difference between the home team trailing by one run, and conversely holding a

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<sup>70</sup> Caillois, p. 8

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid* p. 8

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid* p. 9

five-run lead during the 9<sup>th</sup> inning while down to its last out of a baseball game. In the former circumstance the crowd would be waving towels and cheering knowing one swing of the bat can tie the game. That tension and electricity described by Huizinga sweeps through those involved because the action is still unfolding and is far from resolved. In the latter case, the play sphere dissolves because the circumstances have eliminated the element of uncertainty upon the resolution of play. Hence why in the latter situation, the visitor's 27<sup>th</sup> out signals the point when teams will promptly retire to the showers, thereby ignoring the legislated rules maintaining the play order by foregoing their 'at bat' because nothing more can be decided in game because it is won, decisively. The same is true for other sports where a team firmly secures facile victory. Nothing is more anticlimactic than a contest decided by half time because one team is significantly overmatched. Certainty is the antithesis of play, since it removes the latitude of a player's control over his or her own circumstance when the game has been essentially determined. Well-executed play, at least in sport, flows from beautifully-improvised reaction in response to one's opponent working in harmonious concert. The obligation to operate within the framework of the rules brings rise to the moral component of the activity in structured play, as previously introduced. For Caillois and myself, the just result is one that is uncertain, and by continuing the uncertainty within the play sphere, one can remain at play in this dynamic with an opponent.

In summation Caillois describes the characteristics comprising play as: (1) free activity/choice: (2) a play sphere separated by space and time: (3) uncertain course of action: (4) unproductive state of affairs: (5) governed by rules: and (6)

operating within a fictitious reality (Caillois, p. 9).<sup>73</sup> This definition doesn't diverge much from Huizinga's which states: (1) play is voluntary: (2) it is different from ordinary affairs especially those of material interest: (3) it is secluded or limited by special times, places, and cultural configurations: (4) explores tension and balance within the framework of the rules: and (5) characterized by secrecy and disguise.<sup>74</sup>

Thomas Henricks, a contemporary play theorist, recognizes Caillois' work as a response to Homo Ludens that fortifies the play concept in a subtle way.<sup>75</sup> Upon analysis of the two definitions, both Huizinga and Caillois seem to generally agree on play's basic structure, as Caillois makes only the slightest revisions to Huizinga's original definition.<sup>76</sup> Henrick asserts about Huizinga,

Against the long-standing philosophical tradition of *homo sapiens*-humans as thinkers-and the materialist thesis of *homo faber*-humans as makers-Huizinga advances his claim for *homo ludens*-humans as players-a vision of people as active explorers and negotiators of societal possibility. In Huizinga's view, people have an impulse to play that cannot be explained by other factors or elements of human society or nature. This creative impulse has been critical to processes of societal self-consciousness and renewal throughout history. Because of this, contemporary societies should be careful not to restrict or corrupt the very activity that forms one basis of their existence.<sup>77</sup>

Henrick's believes Caillois' sociological arguments of ritualized behavior guaranteeing the purity of sacred spaces like play suggests he shares a similar anti-utilitarian spirit with Huizinga.<sup>78</sup> However, I would like to point out that Caillois

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<sup>73</sup> Caillois, p. 9

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Henricks, "Caillois's Man, Play, and Games an Appreciation and Evaluation," *American Journal of Play* Fall 2010: p. 166

<sup>75</sup> Henricks, p. 166

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* p. 166

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid* p. 162

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid* p. 162

makes a radical departure from the extensive umbrella of Huizinga's definition of play only to once again qualify the player according to the purpose of production, the ultimate goal of *homo faber*. Huizinga simply precludes play from being useful for external goods in his definition, while Caillois considers play relative to function in determining that it is unproductive. Such language implies play is being measured against conduct that is means-ended, which I see as a key misstep by Caillois.

## 2.3 Caillois' Play Continuum and Typology of Games

Despite this misstep during the assembly of a definition, Caillois' addition to the literature is significant because he evolves his theory from Huizinga's broad account of play to include the close relation of the concept of game. Caillois specifically defines the multiple forms of 'game' that contribute to his refined definition of play. Caillois distinguishes between play and games, representing the first logical progression assisting sport philosophers with determining the relationship between the more recent concept of the 'tricky triad.' By expanding his definition of 'play' to utilize a typology of 'game' Caillois should be credited with improving the definitional concept. He highlights the different experiences sensed by the player throughout a wide range of games. However, he is unable to precisely outline the essence of the *specie* 'game' independent of the play concept. Caillois simply subsumes it under the genus play. Caillois' definitional structure seems to fall into the trap of conflating the concepts of 'game' and 'play', posited by Carlson in the next

section. Caillois views games on a wide spectrum differentiating games by elements of competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo.<sup>79</sup>

Caillois' typology of games is a fundamental aspect to his text, primarily because it structures the range of experience from primitive play all the way to highly structured play.<sup>80</sup> The typology of games forwarded by Caillois doesn't differentiate between types of game using mental or physical skills, but solely on the basis of how each game's framework draws distinctive play characteristics. This leads to the identification of four types of game forms: *Agon*, *Alea*, *Mimicry*, and *Ilinx*. Each of the four forms represent a similar general nature of game, but the division between each form rests on Caillois' innovative concept of a 'play' continuum that seems to begin identifying games and the serious activity of sports as being determined by the structure of the activity. He designates one end of the continuum to represent *paidia*.<sup>81</sup> *Paidia* is viewed as completely unstructured, frolicsome, and frivolous. The polar opposite end of the play continuum is designated as *ludus*. *Ludus* signifies activity that is purposeful, contains artificial restrictions, and requires tremendous skill and effort to overcome these impediments. The range of play on Caillois' continuum is linked with the range of experience a player undergoes when moving along from primitive play to high performance activity. Caillois suitably identifies the structural mechanisms that dictate the range of experience within the play sphere that are a central element of games within the following classification table.

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<sup>79</sup> Caillois, p. 12

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid* p. 27

<sup>81</sup> *Paidia* comes from the ancient Greek word 'child,' essentially implying play in its purest form.

Figure 1: Classification of Games<sup>82</sup>

	<i>AGÔN</i> (Competition)	<i>ALEA</i> (Chance)	<i>MIMICRY</i> (Simulation)	<i>ILINX</i> (Vertigo)
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>PAIDIA</i></p> <p>Tumult Agitation Immoderate laughter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>	Racing Wrestling Etc. Athletics <span style="font-size: 2em; vertical-align: middle;">}</span> not regulated	Counting-out rhymes Heads or tails	Children's initiations Games of illusion Tag, Arms Masks, Disguises	Children "whirling" Horseback riding Swinging Waltzing
	Kite-flying Solitaire Patience Crossword puzzles <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>LUDUS</i></p>	Boxing, Billiards Fencing, Checkers Football, Chess  Contests, Sports in general	Betting Roulette  Simple, complex, and continuing lotteries	Theater Spectacles in general

\* In each vertical column games are classified in such an order that the *paidia* element is constantly decreasing while the *ludus* element is ever increasing.

Caillois' four 'game' types expand immensely upon Huizinga's early account of 'play', which assimilates all cultural play activities occurring into the form of a contest.<sup>83</sup> Caillois uses the play continuum to sort between different activities belonging to his four games categories. The combination of the concepts play and game represents the confusion alluded to earlier, and will be addressed further in the next section on Carlson's idea of the conflation of play and game. The table above provides a clear illustration of how Caillois orders and defines activity

<sup>82</sup> Caillois, p. 36

<sup>83</sup> Henricks, p. 162

according to the play continuum with the sub-set of each type of game. Like his predecessor, Caillois begins with the most recognizable game form to humanity, that he terms *Agon*. These 'games' reflect the *ludus* pole of the play spectrum taking the forms of game and sport within the framework of a 'contest.' Typically these contests begin from a point of equality, attempting to balance the chances of winning for either side.<sup>84</sup> The play form presupposes sustained attention and skill development on the player's part according to the structured *ludus* pole of the spectrum that restricts the player to operate within the framework of the rules.<sup>85</sup> The game type *Alea* poses a fundamental contrast with *Agon*. Such play excludes the decision-making power of the player and the outcome is no longer subject to their control. In this case, fortune is the sole determinant of success in this play form because they have relinquished all control to elements of chance. However, both play forms can be combined into a hybridized style of play. Caillois cites the example of card games where blind luck (*Alea*) and optimal strategy (*Agon*) combine to make the play world more thrilling than it otherwise would due to the uncertainty.<sup>86</sup> *Agon* and *Alea* imply opposite and somewhat complementary attitudes, but they both obey the same law in creating the conditions of pure equality denied in real life.<sup>87</sup> The perfected nature of the background conditions, in combination with the rule-bound structure is what makes the play world special in this instance. Most importantly this development exposes the inadequacy of

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<sup>84</sup> Henricks, p. 162

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid* p. 163

<sup>86</sup> Caillois, p. 18

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* p. 19

Huizinga's parochial account of play as only occurring in the form of a contest.<sup>88</sup> The fact that a range of experiences can be faced possibly in conjunction with one another seems to progress the complexity of play's multi-faceted nature especially when contrasted with Caillois' two remaining categories. *Mimicry* is the third play form identified by Caillois, which greatly expands the possibility of what activities can be considered play. Caillois defines mimicry as follows;

Presupposing the temporary and free acceptance, if not of an illusion (illusion is a word with loaded meaning deriving from the combination of the Latin preposition and stem, literally meaning in a state of play), then at least of closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe.<sup>89</sup>

The player attempts to escape from him or herself through playful illusion in order to construct and truly be something or someone of make-believe. Such behavior contains all the necessary characteristics to be classified as play since it occurs freely, within the magic circle, has a sense of order, and possesses an obvious fictitious element supporting the play sphere.<sup>90</sup> *Mimicry* begins as we move further away from *ludus* end of the continuum, towards the *paidia* end. This type of playful behavior is witnessed in all sorts of activity. Caillois cites the common example of a child's tendency to mimic adult behavior, such as the previous example used of 'cops and robbers.' However, Caillois provides a most surprising example of adult mimicry we ordinarily wouldn't recognize as play, in the dramatic arts.<sup>91</sup> It becomes reasonable to surmise this form of play is where theatre gets the colloquial

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<sup>88</sup> Henricks, p. 162

<sup>89</sup> Caillois, p. 19

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid* p. 20

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid* p. 21

appellation “a play.” The play element present is the transformation to something considered other, and distinct from self, while remaining consciously grounded in the fact of creating an illusion. The actor does not try to make you truly believe that he is really the tragic hero Oedipus. It’s only the real life spy who attempts to convince themselves of their deception because they aren’t playing, their conduct is profoundly serious.<sup>92</sup>

In examining the play element, the spectators or non-participants have been largely overlooked mainly by Huizinga. Caillois brilliantly points out that mimicry isn’t reserved for the aforementioned situations, but occurs in conjunction with the contest as well.<sup>93</sup> Due to the required nature of uncertainty as a fundamental characteristic of the contest, Caillois suggests the spectator demonstrates an inclination towards identifying with a champion.<sup>94</sup> I submit that identifying with the champion player in itself constitutes *mimicry*, similar to the emotions that captivate the reader allowing them to visualize and live within the precarious and uncertain world of their protagonist. Daniel Wann and Nyla Branscombe describe the sporting equivalent of this form of mimicry as basking in reflected glory (BIRGing).<sup>95</sup> Wann & Branscombe theories derive from the field of psychology. Their analysis of the concept of BIRGing is rooted social identity theory (Wann & Branscombe, p.107).<sup>96</sup> This explains how one’s self esteem can be influenced by another individual’s

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<sup>92</sup> Caillois, p. 20

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid* p. 22

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid* p. 22

<sup>95</sup> Wann & Branscombe, “Die-hard and fair-weather fans: Effects of identification on BIRGing and CORFing tendencies,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 14(2) 1990: p. 107

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid* p. 107

success through identifying with them vicariously.<sup>97</sup> Wann & Branscombe suggest a natural connection develops when a spectator becomes enamored with a person or group playing in a contest due to shared characteristics. The cultural value of play in the form of contest is undeniable and is pointed in Huizinga's first analysis of play in Homo Ludens.<sup>98</sup> Sports easily rival works of great cultural significance like novels and movies from the standpoint of *mimicry*. However, sports events are nevertheless special occasions for *mimicry*, since the simulation is transferred from the participants to the spectating audience.<sup>99</sup> Identification with the champion in itself (BIRGing) constitutes *mimicry* related to that of the reader with the hero of a novel. The captivity of sport on the spectator surpasses the playful mimicry of a reader because the potential hero playing in the contest struggles to attain a desired but unrealized end that is uncertain, unlike the classic book that invariably ends in the with the same resolution. Despite the uncertainty in sport, the fanatical spectator has already envisioned or dreamt of the desired end through imitative play, explaining their euphoric craze once their hero has been crowned.

The final play form proposed by Caillois is completely unstructured and nonsensical. "*Ilinx* is the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."<sup>100</sup> Ironically the very name *ilinx* derives from

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<sup>97</sup> Wann & Branscombe, p. 107

<sup>98</sup> Huizinga, p. 10

<sup>99</sup> Caillois, p. 22

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid* p. 23

the Greek word for vertigo *Ilingos*.<sup>101</sup> This form of play achieves the temporary escape from normal sensory perception, opening up an entirely other world that is euphoric and exhilarating. This type of experience is not achieved easily when limited to one's own body, the body cannot generate the speed or flight required to sense vertigo. However, with instruments and technology, spectacular exploits are now becoming more common, whether that be the circus acrobat, or the lunacy of base jumpers and wind-suit pilots. Therefore, I'm of the belief that thrill seekers who push the limits of their bodies through untraditional and perilous means, experience play, in the form of *Ilingos*, just as a ball player would, but can also receive the added benefit of complete rapture. Regardless of the nature of their chosen activity, being decidedly different from traditional games they are involved within a type of activity that provides them a similar play experience that contains all the six characteristics of play but from a different experience brought on by the pursuit of vertigo.

## 2.4 The Conflation of Play

Chad Carlson is a contemporary sport philosopher who suggests that the question of the connection between play and games is an important question that is yet to be adequately answered. Carlson finds faults within the analysis of Huizinga and Caillois' definition of play, grouping other later play theorists with making the similar mistake of conflation.<sup>102</sup> The aforementioned authors fit into a pattern of

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<sup>101</sup> Caillois, p. 24

<sup>102</sup> Chad Carlson, "The 'Playing' Field: Attitudes, Activities, and the Conflation of Play and Games," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 36 (2011): p. 74

depicting an ambiguous, or otherwise confusing, description of play and game.<sup>103</sup> This mistake has resulted in what Carlson describes as the conflation of play and game. Conflation is the unwarranted combining of two things into one, especially concerning similar phenomena whose differences are often overlooked, ignored, or mistaken.<sup>104</sup> Carlson specifically posits that Huizinga's conditions, that lead to his definition, is the origin of the conflation.<sup>105</sup> Huizinga fails to distinguish clearly between two aspects of lived experience.<sup>106</sup> These ambiguities result in play being understood as a combination between an approach to doing something, and the particular thing that is being done.<sup>107</sup> Huizinga's initial characteristics such as being voluntary, free, and absorbing the player intensely and utterly, speak to a player's attitude or stance towards the activity in question.<sup>108</sup> Yet, some of the remaining characteristics are those of how activities are conducted such as fixed rules and order. Huizinga establishes his definition of play using a hybrid account of an attitudinal approach and an activity based understanding of it. Arising from this is the problem clarity between play and games.<sup>109</sup> Chad Carlson's highlights the problem regarding the conflation, while also providing the precise criteria for distinguishing between play and games. Carlson goes on to explain the idea of conflation and how original definitions of play mislead previous sport philosophers.

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<sup>103</sup> Carlson, p. 78

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid* p. 74

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid* p. 75

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid* p. 75

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid* p. 75

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid* p. 76

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid* p. 78

Play exists while demonstrating an autotelic approach to the world, essentially participating because the pursuits chosen are ends in and of themselves. Play can also be described as the thing which one is engaged for example climbing trees, building sandcastles, or simply hitting the baseball without the presence of fielders. Similarly games are also understood as things, activities, and conventions like chess, Sudoku, or football. But we also refer to gaming as an attitude, perhaps an ironic or gratuitous attitude of looking for and taking on unnecessary problems. Thus, it would be reasonable to distinguish playing from play activities and gaming from game activities. Playing and gaming, as stances or attitudes, are ways in which we do things. They are distinct intentionalities toward the projects we encounter. For playing, the intentionality or act is autotelic, while for gaming it is *lusory* essentially aiming at a solution of an unnecessary problem. Conflation problems stem from a failure to properly highlight these distinctions and accurately characterize them. On the side of intentionality- that is the side of attitudes, stances, and approaches to the world it becomes apparent that the play stance and the gaming attitude are distinct and compatible. That is, they have a life of their own, but they also overlap. We see their overlap in the compound or nested intentionality of what Suits ambiguously calls game playing. It is an intentionality that is both autotelic and lusory at the same time. Game players, in the deepest sense of those terms, are looking for engaging artificial problems as an end in itself.<sup>110</sup>

Carlson's argument certainly exposes the possibility that Huizinga seems to conflate play with the close relationship it has with games. This produces the unintended result of defining play using the nearly identical structural criteria of a game. Following Huizinga, philosophers of sport credit his work defining play as a critical milestone to work from, making possible the further distinctions between the nature of sports and games. The agent participating in games and sports has a play like attitude that exemplifies these structured activities that are grounded within the domain of play. Huizinga doesn't attempt to chart the connections between games and sports, however, it is clear he views them as both possessing playful characteristics. This is primarily due to the fact that Huizinga conceives of

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<sup>110</sup>Carlson, p. 78

play from the standpoint of competition or agonistic struggle.<sup>111</sup> Such a narrow perspective on play' is what constitutes the extent of play in his pioneering definition, according to Henricks.

Caillois' classification of games within play similarly contributes towards a logical confusion of the two concepts.<sup>112</sup> This stems from the alternating use of the concept of 'play ' and 'game' in the second chapter of Man, Play, Games.<sup>113</sup> A major objection requiring serious consideration involves the distinguished factors between 'play' and 'game' that are no longer so clearly defined after Caillois' theory on their relationship has been established. Within the scope of Man, Play, and Games, game and sport remain impregnated within the motherly domain of play, not yet mature enough to be considered distinct entities.

The amorphous relation Caillois draws between play and game doesn't help in outlining what constitutes a game. This is especially troubling in the initial two chapters: 'The Definition of Play,' and 'The Classification of Games,' that are predicated on definitional advancement of Huizinga's original work.<sup>114</sup> Caillois uses the terms 'play' and 'game' interchangeably, first reworking Huizinga's definition of play, but upon transitioning to his typology of 'play,' he uses the term 'games' referring to the same concept.<sup>115</sup> The shift in terminology occurs without any indication of a transition from one phenomenon to another.<sup>116</sup> It could be suggested that Caillois seems to consider that play and games are linked and, hence, the

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<sup>111</sup>Henricks, p. 162

<sup>112</sup> Carlson, p. 76

<sup>113</sup> Caillois, p. 14

<sup>114</sup> Carlson p. 76

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid* p. 76

unselective appearance of each term throughout crucial parts of the text while establishing the critical defining points of the play concept. The terminology used to enhance Huizinga's definition in addition to Caillois' expansion of the range of play, results in the conflation of play and games, as identified by Carlson and confirmed for myself. As a consequence, I'm unclear if play and games are separate phenomena, or one in the same, for Caillois.

## 2.5 Sub-Conclusion of the Analytical Definitions of Play

Both Huizinga and Caillois provide a sturdy foundation to begin scrutiny of game and sport by underscoring their close relationship with play. Despite the strength on their respective accounts of play, neither seeks to explicitly define the essence of game or its relation. However I believe some characteristics of their definitions require retooling if we are to view play as a meaningful concept. The definitions, as presented by both Huizinga and Caillois, fail to convey why play is a sacred space requiring a shielding force from what seems to be the inescapable encroachment of ordinary means-ended behavior. Both dedicate significant attention to what seems like the inevitable; however, they fail to specifically explicate why or what meaning comes from playing, which in this specific instance applies to sport. I will answer this important objection I have to the works of both of these early play theorists throughout the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: A New Perspective

### 3.1 Going from the Analytical to the Existential

The most salient characteristic put forth by both Huizinga and Caillois is the relative insignificance of play. Huizinga claims play cannot produce external good, while Caillois considers it to be unproductive or pure waste. Caillois' outlook requires immediate attention as it proves more troubling, since it maintains the position that play has no utility whatsoever and is pure waste. By this statement one could determine, *ipso facto*, that play carries no meaning when regarded in that way. Such thinking completely trivializes one's efforts during play activity, essentially reducing it to mean nothing subsequent to the disintegration of the magic circle. My contention early on in the introduction, claims that this is simply not true, and for Caillois to characterize play in this way is very disconcerting. For Caillois to even utilize a tiny fraction of means-ended thought to influence his perspective brings us to an impasse that perfectly encapsulates the maddening absurdity at the center of the play concept. If we accept Caillois' premise the question now quickly becomes, why engage in any activity if no possible good i.e. utility can become of it? We know sport can't possibly be a complete waste of time or no one would engage in it over ordinary activity; therefore, other factors beyond the benefit of means-ended behavior must be operating here. For, to exist in the play world without any possible benefit would be absurd, illogical, and truly devoid of meaning. Huizinga and Caillois are both important for their early exploration of the play concept and their respective definitions, but it is my assertion that the best way to understand

the meaning of play is to shift from that of analytical formalism to existentialism. I will attempt to prove that play contains existential meaning by viewing the player through the lens of an analogous paradoxical absurdity in the myth of Sisyphus.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.2 The Myth of Sisyphus

Albert Camus is one of the philosophers best known for elevating the philosophic movement of ‘absurdism.’ Camus’ well-known book, The Myth of Sisyphus, attempts to assist humanity in the search for meaning within an absurd world without universal truths or values. The bulk of Camus’ text is unrelated to my purpose as he primarily focuses upon the question of suicide, once one is faced with realization of the absurd. Where Camus’ text becomes useful for the purpose at hand, is his final chapter, in which he highlights the myth of the text’s namesake that parallels nicely with ‘the player.’ We first encounter the myth of Sisyphus by way of the Homeric hero Odysseus’ self-report of his return from the underworld Tartarus.<sup>118</sup> Known among the notorious sinners,<sup>119</sup> Sisyphus was a trickster who deceived the gods by shackling Thanatos in order to prevent humans from dying. The Olympian gods freed Thanatos from bondage to restore the natural order, and punished Sisyphus by banishing him to the underworld, only to escape Hades’ lair shortly thereafter

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<sup>117</sup> Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 1969), p. 119

<sup>118</sup> Homer, The Odyssey, trans. by Samuel Butler. (Barnes & Noble, 2012), Book XI p. 131

<sup>119</sup> Stephen Harris & Gloria Platzner, Classical Mythology: Images and Insights. (McGraw-Hill: New York, 2008), p. 301

upon using another cunning trick. After being forcibly returned to the underworld by Hermes, Sisyphus is punished by Zeus for his incredible hubris.

### 3.3 The Absurd within the Play Paradox and the Absurd

#### Myth of Sisyphus

Randolph Feezell follows on the heels of Camus using the myth of Sisyphus, but this time for its application to the paradox of playing sport. Feezell has produced a lot of research in the field of philosophy of sport, primarily focusing on the metaphysical aspect of sport and ‘the player’s’ thinking within such an arbitrary pursuit. The utilization of the myth of Sisyphus presents a great contrast to the ideas presented by Caillois according to Feezell’s analysis of how it relates to sport.<sup>120</sup> Sisyphus is condemned to the eternal drudgery of ceaselessly pushing a heavy stone to the top of a hill, only to see it descend back down, where he must retrieve it and continue his endless toil.<sup>121</sup> However, it is never explicitly mentioned how Sisyphus withstands his punishment in the underworld, only leaving us to imagine how he endures while directly confronting his absurd fate. Sisyphus exists in all eternity as proletarian of the gods, powerless in the present and future, due the rebellious nature of his past.<sup>122</sup> Each time Sisyphus makes his descent down his hill it provides him a full appreciation of the extent of his wretched condition.<sup>123</sup> Camus asserts that it is during that descent to the base of the hill that Sisyphus becomes most

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<sup>120</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 48

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid* p. 46

<sup>122</sup> Camus, p. 121

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid* p. 121

interesting and becomes curious.<sup>124</sup> Sisyphus parallels nicely with the player due to the shared pointlessness in which their tasks are grounded.

Feezell underscores the connection between Sisyphus and *homo ludens* through the following analogy, “What is absurd, perhaps, is the incongruity between human purposiveness and necessary frustration.”<sup>125</sup> Sisyphus’ plight is as one whose entire being is exerted towards the accomplishment of nothing, at least in terms of progression, because his task is circular. In order for Feezell to find meaning within what appears to be sport’s insignificance, the question he faces when invoking Sisyphus, which he doesn’t explicitly ask, takes the following form: “Are the player and Sisyphus kindred spirits, and if not, what is difference between them”? This answer possibly holds the key to unlocking fruits of play’s existential meaning, while consequently supporting my earlier objection to Caillois’ proposition of play being unavailing or a complete waste. This will be achieved by distilling the meaning of the play concept against what appears to be the epitome of meaninglessness in Sisyphus.

### 3.4 Finding Play’s Meaning Through a Contrast with Sisyphian Absurdity

Let us reflect back to Huizinga who doesn’t preclude the possibility of value in the play activity, but suggests such value cannot be linked to the ordinary world beyond the magic circle. Caillois leaves himself drastically smaller space in which his

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<sup>124</sup> Camus, p. 121

<sup>125</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 48

definition may operate, since he considered play unproductive and a complete waste. Feezell, and I, would agree that Sisyphus' drudgery compares nicely to Caillois' characteristic of play because nothing practical becomes of his labor beyond further repetition of the same useless task.<sup>126</sup> The problem here lies in Caillois' outlook that measures play according to practicality of *homo faber*. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to suggest play begins similarly to the drudgery of Sisyphus for the player, since they complete an unimportant goal relative to the context of quotidian life. However, I am of the opinion that it would be a mistake to liken the absurdity of play to being truly identical to the absurdity of Sisyphus' labour. Although, it is important to point out this comparison provides us better insight in understanding that meaning drawn from life, stems only from the intrinsic.

It should be reiterated that Sisyphus' labor is a punishment that is involuntary, which poses a stark contrast to the voluntary conduct of the player who freely engages in play according to the definitions of both Huizinga and Caillois. Play is never constrained or forced, or else the activity wouldn't be play.<sup>127</sup> Sisyphus has been stripped of the freedom to choose the unserious activity in which play is rooted, rooted for its own sake. I believe the compulsory nature of his activities in the myth represents the *nadir* of Sisyphus' life. The humiliation felt by Sisyphus stems from the stripping of his autonomy and self-determination of how he brings purpose and fulfillment to his own life. Instead Zeus the supreme Olympian god imposed a punishment on Sisyphus that was essentially the same as fellow notorious sinner Prometheus, who is to be bound to a rock suffering passively for all

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<sup>126</sup> Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*. p. 46

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid* p. 49

eternity.<sup>128</sup> Only, Sisyphus is fettered to his rock, but his sentence is crueler because it actively robs him of choice in determining how he is to fulfill his existence as he is forced to complete the same task for all eternity. Yet his task serves as constant reminder of the potential of his existence that will be forever wasted in vacuous drudgery. While Zeus has stripped Sisyphus of complete autonomy, he punishes him with this useless task because normal punishment typically serves some sort of greater utility, where usefulness in itself contains some inherent meaning. Zeus designed the punishment for the exact purpose of robbing Sisyphus of any significance he would have enjoyed as result of all his deception as a trickster prior to his arrival to Tartarus.<sup>129</sup> The irony at the center of Sisyphus' predicament for the Olympian gods rests in the fact that such an incredible task, completed repetitively, would cease to bear any meaning when done for all eternity. Although the punishment has been externally imposed upon Sisyphus, he continues in perpetuity with no explicit mention of any externally applied pressure beyond that of the original command of Zeus. However, Sisyphus' punishment does contribute meaning to his life while at the base of the hill, when he has full appreciation of the absurdity of his predicament. Sisyphus' decision to return to his rock, to shoulder his burden, suggests intrinsic meaning persists amidst the complete misery shaping his existence as he begins his recurring decent from the summit. It is this assertion of the significance of the little enduring intrinsic meaning within Sisyphus that leads Camus to his curious conclusion of the book. Camus suggests crushing truths cease to pose a problem when they are acknowledge and opposed. He goes on to suggest

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<sup>128</sup> Harris & Platzner, Classical Mythology: Images and Insights, p. 300

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid* p. 302

that, "The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory."<sup>130</sup> When one acknowledges terrible truths, one thereby rises above them.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.<sup>131</sup>

Play has similarities to the form of Sisyphus' punishment with respect to the insignificance of the task undertaken; however, both contain intrinsic meaning for most individuals involved. Most sport games that are played are dedicated to accomplishing what is a rather monotonous task, only in an extraordinary way! Consider the parallel of the marathoner or long distance swimmer with Sisyphus. There is no reason for them to traverse a road course or body of water with the advent of automobile and nautical transportation. Their actions are on par with the level of uselessness of those of Sisyphus, but their reasons for engaging in such conduct differ completely. Therefore, I posit that playing in the realm of sport is simply a heightened sense of intrinsic meaning to the player, due to the imaginative component that is the distinguishing factor between the two endeavors. However, the important concept of volition is critical in the juxtaposition of Sisyphus' drudgery with the amusement of the player. One primary difference between the two absurdities rests in the fact Sisyphus' labor is interminable, while the player's 'play' is not. When a player voluntarily engages in a game he or she does so while

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<sup>130</sup> Camus, p. 121

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid* p. 123

observing the rules designed to bring about some end or final goal due to the meaningfulness of choosing that pursuit. I am suggesting that playful activities take on a clear meaning by virtue of choosing the very rule system internal to a specific play sphere. Therefore, obvious intrinsic meaning results from the players' deep vested personal interests in that particular form of 'play' and the way they embrace their embodiment accordingly.

Coupled with the concept of choice, is the fact of play's temporary nature, which is wholly different from Sisyphus' toil. Feezell also points out that the decision to choose the rules that generate Huizinga's concept of the magic circle presents a critical structural element to play that Sisyphus' toil doesn't have, namely, a conclusion. Play activities are purposive insofar as they are oriented toward the ends internal to the play world, and they lead toward a consummation.<sup>132</sup> In the world of Sisyphus there can be no consummation because there is no final end to his toil. This teleological aspect of play gives meaning to the activities that lead toward a specific end in view, or a cloudy indeterminate one. The fact that an end exists is another fundamental difference between *homo ludens* and Sisyphus, because without it consummation is impossible.<sup>133</sup> Play, according to Feezell, especially when occurring in the form of the contest, is a quest with purpose, ending in fulfillment of Caillois' ludic prescriptions.<sup>134</sup> Thus, being able to freely exist, and choose how you arrive at the desired end one seeks, is central to the heightened intrinsic value of play. Although, I agree with the suggestion that 'play' is

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<sup>132</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 48

<sup>133</sup> *homo ludens* is not used in reference to Huizinga's book but the concept of "playing man" translated from the Latin title.

<sup>134</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 48

considered absurd, it must not be thought so by virtue of an exact analogy with the absurdity of Sisyphus' plight.<sup>135</sup> Absurdity in the 'play' form contains heightened meaning for the individual. While it is also true that intrinsic value is not a concept completely lost onto Sisyphus; therefore he still experiences such value in the face of the absurd when he returns to his task. It is in this point where Feezell and I begin to diverge. Feezell believes absurdity doesn't translate to meaningless within play, a premise to which I agree. However, he sees no intrinsic value within Sisyphus' toil.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, Feezell views the analogy as an inexact parallel of sorts, where I view it as especially apt from the standpoint distinguishing the heightened intrinsic meaning of play amidst the absurdity of a unique concept in sport.

Richard Taylor, another prominent philosopher who dealt with the question of the meaning of life using the myth of Sisyphus, would certainly agree with Feezell's point regarding an activity's culmination. Consider Taylor's remark from Good and Evil,

Meaninglessness is essentially endless pointlessness, and meaningfulness is therefore the opposite. Activity, and even long, protracted, repetitive activity has a meaning if it has some culmination, some more or less lasting end that can be considered to have been the direction and purpose of the activity.<sup>137</sup>

This passage becomes clearer when considering play, according to Caillois' play continuum, as activities progress toward the *Ludus* end of the spectrum. The following expressions capture the difference between *homo ludens* and Sisyphus perfectly: "just finish the race," "giving a competitor one's best effort," or "leaving it

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<sup>135</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection p. 50

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid* p. 50

<sup>137</sup> Richard Taylor, (1970) Good and Evil. (Macmillan: New York), p. 58

all out on the field for your teammates.” Such statements possess a decided element of finality, indicating the momentary nature of sport, due to existence of choice and freedom within play, with which, both Taylor and Feezell would agree. Along with this sense of finality, I believe we gain a productive element, at least intrinsically. If the decision to play stems from an intrinsic choice, play need not serve any external or tangible appetite according to our earlier definitions.<sup>138</sup> It becomes rewarding emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually because it is the ultimate expression of freedom to direct one’s will towards self-actualization in the form believed to carry the most meaning for the individual.

Ultimately, we must return our focus to Caillois and the claim suggesting play is unproductive. Play throughout the entire range of Caillois’ spectrum contains intrinsic good available simply by undertaking the playful activity. However, Caillois correctly points out, playful activity exists on a continuum because the nature of the play experience resonates quite differently between individuals and, hence, the slight difference of the activity in our introductory example of Suzy (tee-ball) and Ken Griffey (MLB), despite what may be similar intrinsic motivation felt by each. This is why play cannot be considered a single homogenous thing that Huizinga proposed.<sup>139</sup> I believe there are similarities between hide-and-go seek, playing tag, playing catch, baseball, rowing, and even gladiatorial combat, but the experience of playing each of them is not completely identical. Each game possesses a distinct combination of game elements previously described by Caillois, which shape the player’s unique playing experience. Certain values inherent within each activity

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<sup>138</sup> Huizinga, p. 13

<sup>139</sup> Henricks, p. 162

resonate with a person's particular stage of development, interests, experiences that contribute to a very meaningful mode of achieving self-actualization defined by the individual's free choice and the teleological nature of the activity. Each stage of growth as result of this transformative experience, in itself, demonstrates the value of play. Such personal value is of a different sort than what I suspect Caillois intended in his definition by using the word "useless." Nonetheless, I believe I have established that a element unique to the individual is central to the play concept within the heart of every person truly 'playing' sports.

Using the work of Feezell and Taylor, it has been established that a connection between freedom of choice and intrinsic significance lies at the heart play's meaning. The analogy between *homo ludens* and Sisyphus is once again tremendously helpful for evaluating the significance of play stemming from the original characteristics outlined by Huizinga and Caillois. *Homo ludens* and Sisyphus approach their respective activities from oddly similar perspectives within their own hearts. *Homo ludens* chooses to freely engage in play when accomplishing something rather insignificant, while Sisyphus continually perseveres while essentially bound to his rock. Sisyphus lives a completely inconsequential existence for all eternity, undertaking what is thought to be an intrinsically meaningless task, but is truly extrinsically meaningless. However, it should be pointed out that although he did not choose to be condemned to such a miserable existence, he invests himself in shouldering his burden like the player does his task. The outlook each carries toward his task is of the utmost importance, for suppose that Sisyphus

wanted to do what he is, in fact, doomed forever to do by necessity.<sup>140</sup> Sisyphus' task would be pleasurable as oppose to baneful because his task would match his desires. However, the purpose of his task bears meaning only through fulfilling it as a form of punishment. Sisyphus realizes the absurdity, but escapes its hold.

Although he is not able to freely choose, he continually approaches his rock with effort and resolve knowing it contributes to his eternal torment, which certifies him as the absurd hero.<sup>141</sup> Camus ultimately uses the myth of Sisyphus to imply that the only meaning that can be drawn from our lives is of the intrinsic variety, since extrinsic meaning can't be gained while immersed in an absurd pursuit e.g. sports.

Camus' example of suicide, and also what I would describe as a general unwillingness to accept the absurdity of one's circumstance, disagrees with the characteristics of the ideal player.

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<sup>140</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 51

<sup>141</sup> Camus, p. 121

## Chapter 4: Balancing Both Sides of the Player

### 4.1 The Absurdity of *Homo Ludens*

What makes Sisyphus the archetype of the absurd life is the gap between his desires and the reality of his activity; he is burdened with attitudes inconsistent with his situation.<sup>142</sup> It is difficult for Feezell to conceive of something objectively absurd, because the absurd seems to be a function of wills, desires, and interests.<sup>143</sup> The player's intrinsic purpose changes his understanding as he enters the play sphere, allowing him to incorporate a serious attitude to the trivial. Therefore, his play seems wholly contradictory to the endless drudgery of Sisyphus from the standpoint of attitude, despite carrying out a nearly identical task with respect to means-ended significance. Yet, this difference exposes the fundamental tension between the player's serious attitude and the reality of the true insignificance of playfulness in the ordinary world for Feezell. Feezell highlights the dynamic between two inconsistent attitudes that define the play sphere. "Unlike Sisyphus, the player regards his activity as if it were truly significant, but, like Sisyphus, the player really does come up empty handed."<sup>144</sup> Nothing tangible comes of play, and the player only consciously recognizes that play is really unserious subsequent to the dissolution of the magic circle. When in play the player momentarily transcends quotidian life to enter Huizinga's consecrated magic circle, which has its own meanings and prescriptions. The freedom of play suggests that we voluntarily

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<sup>142</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 51

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid* p. 51

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid* p. 51

bracket our ordinary and pressing concerns as we take a stance outside the practical affairs of life.<sup>145</sup> Recall one of Huizinga's essential characteristics of play:

Play is not ordinary or real life. It is rather a stepping out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own. The essence of play comes into existence through a decision to play. Such a constitutive decision cannot be compelled and is essentially free. Through it arises the suspension of the ordinary concerns of the everyday world. Such a decision does not simply initiate the playing but rather constitutes it."<sup>146</sup>

Thus according to Feezell, one might see the positive aspect of play as transcendence of worldly constraint in the free projection of alternative possibilities.<sup>147</sup> This separation from the ordinary lends a peculiar flavor to play, for it is a withdrawal from those things normally associated with the seriousness of life. Like the make-believe play of children, there arises a sense of unreality associated with the play world. This make-believe aspect betrays a consciousness of the inferiority of play compared with the seriousness, a feeling that seems to be something as primary as play itself.<sup>148</sup> Although *homo ludens* is charged with tasks seemingly insignificant, the attitude of *homo ludens* presents a curious paradox.<sup>149</sup> *Homo ludens'* behavior is not in keeping with a frivolous attitude typically expected of one when completing such an impractical task. *Homo ludens'* actions within the magic circle point to the contrary; therefore, play is undertaken with utmost seriousness, with an absorption, a devotion that passes into rapture and,

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<sup>145</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 52

<sup>146</sup> Kenneth Schmitz, "Suspension of the Ordinary," ed. Klaus Meier and William Morgan et al., *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (1995): p. 24

<sup>147</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 53

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid* p. 53

temporarily at least, completely abolishes that troublesome temporary feeling.<sup>150</sup> A certain abandon goes along with the freedom to play. So we arrive at a curious dialectic within the experience of play, between the idea of it being unserious, yet also simultaneously profoundly serious. We play our games with abandon and intensity as if nothing in this challenge mattered more than making the basket, winning the game, or overcoming a challenge.

When the attitude of *homo ludens* is contrasted with the means-ended human nature outlined in the introduction, one can gain a better appreciation of the absurdity at the center of 'play'. Recall Feezell's account of the absurd in the instance of 'play' as:

A conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality. The player must at one and the same time embrace the seemingly contradictory attitudes that their play world is a fiction, their commitment to the arbitrary rules of the game is gratuitous; yet they must play as if it really mattered, because their decision to play necessitates such commitment. Without commitment, he really isn't playing, but with commitment, the play sphere becomes the solitary focus of the player despite its trivial purpose overall. In the form of the play contest, the absence of commitment descends the game into mere frolic completely killing the framework designed to bring about aim to the activity. Thomas Nagel stated the following about the absurdity of life as a whole, "We always have available a point of view outside the particular form of our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous." This situation is precisely seen in play, because of the bracketing of the ordinary and the creation of a play sphere with its own internal aspects of time, and space. The always available point of view outside the play world is, of course, the standpoint of the ordinary world that generates the criteria for what we take as really serious. Whenever we say "it's only a game" we acknowledge this ability to detach ourselves from the immediate participation in play, yet this doesn't mean that we will not play seriously, just as the recognition of the absurd doesn't mean that we will henceforth fail to take anything in life seriously. Therefore, to

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<sup>150</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 53

speak of play as absurd describes this structure or dialectic. The absurdity of play describes the incongruous collision between the single-minded aspiration of the player and nature of play that undermines the seriousness of the pursuit. Regardless of whether Nagel is right about life as a whole, the absurdity involved in game playing is apparent through the player's mediation of two antithetical truisms that comprise the duality of spirited play.<sup>151</sup>

## 4.2 Playful Irony

Feezell's passage requires us to revisit Huizinga and Caillois from the standpoint of Thomas Nagel's well-known concept the "view from nowhere." Nagel highlights that humans have the capability of thinking about the world from a standpoint that transcends personal experience. It is this particular perspective Nagel describes as the "view from nowhere."<sup>152</sup> Simultaneously, each person carries his or her own deeply personal views about the world that contribute to his or her own understanding of the world, but don't constitute it. How we reconcile these divergent perceptions is fundamental to progressing to a more nuanced understanding of the 'play' concept. Nagel's concept allows us to build upon analysis of earlier play theorists. Huizinga's previous assertion that sports are non-seriousness is an incomplete truth. A literal understanding of Huizinga's point is simple-minded and fails to truly represent the complexity or depth of play. *Homo ludens* must temper his deep subjective interests and passions with a conflicting sense of objectivity and frivol. One can find further clarity within the 'play' concept when considering the dualistic attitude central to 'play.' I believe it is important to

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<sup>151</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 54

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid* p.58

point out that Huizinga didn't mean 'play' completely lacks seriousness, otherwise he would have used the strongest possible prefix 'not.' While Huizinga demonstrates considerable foresight in this capacity, Caillois seems to stumble into a conceptual rut through the indirect comparison with *homo faber*. Characterizing 'play' as unproductive, or a waste, also implies that it is tantamount to a completely useless means-ended pursuit, or not being a serious endeavour whatsoever within the grand scheme of things. 'Play' is not means-ended because Huizinga clearly established that 'play' is self-serving. Therefore, the interpretation of Caillois' point on the unproductivity of play suggests his evaluation of 'play' fails to appreciate the duality of the 'play' concept. The contention that 'play' is not serious would seem to demonstrate Caillois' failure to understand the ontological nature of 'play' itself.

Feezell notes that there is something deeply ironic about the attitude of the player.<sup>153</sup> Within structured sport approaching the *Ludus* range of Caillois' spectrum, the player must attempt to balance the serious aspirations and reality in an especially precarious way. Feezell uses Nagel's concept of "the view from nowhere" to explain 'play's' tricky duality. He cites the trouble with play and seriousness is determining, "How to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of the same world, the person and the viewpoint included."<sup>154</sup> The play sphere is created and maintained by a set of internal prescriptions dictating the pursuit of an ultimate aim. Players, more often than not, lose themselves and their focus on the importance of the ordinary world

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<sup>153</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 55

<sup>154</sup> Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere. New York: Oxford University Press (1986). p. 67

beyond the 'play' sphere, especially during the crucial points of a contest when athletic drama is unfolding.<sup>155</sup> The situation described above represents a deeply subjective one, based on understanding of the world normally present within the "poor sport." The flaw inherent to poor sports is that their subjective experience in the play sphere seems completely isolated from the effects of an objective viewpoint, which is particularly glaring upon the recognition of play's triviality. This is similarly viewed upon as absurd because it represents, "The collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt."<sup>156</sup> Therefore, we must accord playful activity the requisite seriousness in order to maintain its possibility, while also demonstrating awareness of the ordinary which envelopes the temporary 'play' sphere. To become too serious about play would negate the trivial nature of the situation, while an utter lack of sincerity in the activity, eliminates its possibility.

To this point Fezell has established the absurdity of 'play'. He also provides another important but overlooked characteristic of play, by way of Nagel. The 'play' of *homo ludens* is both trivial and absurd when considering Nagel's concept of 'the view from nowhere.' The player must appreciate the trivial and absurd for what they are, characteristics *sine qua non* to the play spirit. Recognition of this unique perspective is a precondition to the constitution of the player and transforms the ontological nature of the activity from work to 'play.' Therefore, the ideal player participates while guided by the spirit of 'play.' This state exists in the kind of

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<sup>155</sup> Fezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 72

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid* p. 72

golden mean used by Aristotle to determine virtue between two extreme character traits.<sup>157</sup> In the case of play, a precarious balance must be achieved between the excesses of seriousness, and frivolousness, for the player to have a sense of the play spirit.<sup>158</sup> The right combination of means-ended purpose, tempered by frivolity, allows both characteristics to coalesce and form the athletic ironist.<sup>159</sup>

Playing ironically can be best described as:

An awareness of the paradoxical nature of an activity as competitive play in the form of serious nonseriousness, or nonserious seriousness. Irony is an attitude that embraces the basic incongruity of our devotions to triviality, our celebration of absurdity every time we compete intensely and play games seriously.<sup>160</sup>

Our contemporary understanding of play is not so nuanced, nor does it seem to have any sort of dynamic structure. Playing sport, contemporarily, is best understood from the excessive end of one character trait. There is a gross oversimplification of the fluidity of the 'play' experience, and we have seemingly limited the range of possible emotions to be experienced by approaching 'play' with such a parochial scope. This is best understood as a 'play' paradigm that exists through our society's common maxims about 'play', which contribute to our ongoing misunderstanding of sport. This is primarily due to capturing sport as a simplified concept and negating its nuanced nature within the following examples by Feezell.

Consider the ironic stance of the player in the famous Vince Lombardi remark, "Winning is not the most important thing: it's the only thing." Yet conversely there is another famous truism, "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game," as if play was merely the instrument of moral education. Finally, it would also

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<sup>157</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 161

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid* p. 161

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid* p. 77

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid* p. 77

abuse the irony of the play attitude to emphasize entirely the intrinsic value of play to the exclusion of a serious pursuit of an end, "It's not whether you win or lose, but that you play the game." All of these are only partial truths that overemphasize one side of the dialectic. Play is serious, but unreal. You must have it both ways otherwise it ceases to be play.<sup>161</sup>

### 4.3 Contrasting the Absurd with the Analytical Formalist

#### Account of Play

I believe the idea that led Feezell to the concept of 'playful irony,' serves as an excellent basis to further refine the accounts of Huizinga and Caillois. Needless to say, Huizinga was essentially correct as his non-serious characteristic acknowledges the middle ground existing between ordinary seriousness and frivolousness in different, but similar, terms. While I should point out that the more nuanced account of play suggests Caillois was wrong to claim that play is an utter waste. The implication of such meaninglessness fails to recognize the duality previously explained. In being fair, by putting Caillois' remark within the proper context of defending humanity's right to play; his observation certainly isn't meant pejoratively. However, it seriously fails to represent play as something beyond diversion, quite possibly the ultimate sense of perspective toward life. Esteemed writer, philosopher, and theologian, Michael Novack shares an opinion that I support, that playing sports carries significance extending beyond that of a capricious diversion. Similar to Meier's beliefs on play, Novack suggests a stark contrast between means-ended and playful behavior that shapes one's outlook.

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<sup>161</sup> Feezell, Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection. p. 55

Play, not work, is the end of life. To participate in the rites of play is to dwell in the Kingdom of Ends. To participate in work, career, and the making of history is to labor in the Kingdom of Means. The modern age, the age of history, nourishes illusions. In a protestant culture, as in Marxist cultures, work is serious, important, and adult. Its essential significance is overlooked. Work, of course, must be done, but we should be wise enough to distinguish necessity from reality. Play is reality, work is diversion and escape.<sup>162</sup>

My final objection towards these earlier accounts of the 'play' concept pertains to their proposed mutual exclusivity between play and material interests. This problem poses greater difficulties with Caillois' proposal of the 'play' spectrum than it does Huizinga. Caillois effectively reasons that games of chance exist, but external goods aren't produced by the activity but, rather, only redistributed. Thus, helping to maintain the separation of goods as originally conceived by Huizinga. Creating a binary utilizing external reward as a criterion to differentiate between play and non-play generates troubling logical inconsistencies. If a characteristic of play indeed dictates that no wealth or good can be created, this would now make the distinction between professional and amateur irreconcilable. Caillois asserts, "As for professional it is clear that they are not players but workers. When they 'play,' it is at some other game."<sup>163</sup> When considering this problem the question becomes whether an external element, such as extrinsic reward for participants, fundamentally changes the nature of the activity from something resembling play towards something that should be considered work? The most salient difference between the professional and sincere player is the external motivation driving participation. Participating under these conditions transforms 'play,' turning what

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<sup>162</sup> Michael Novak. *The Joy of Sport* (Basic Books: New York, 1976), p. 40

<sup>163</sup> Caillois, p. 6

was once an escape, into obligation, guided by compulsion.<sup>164</sup> Caillois doesn't seem to harbor as much inherent cynicism towards the professional as he considers sport to retain most of its isolated, regulated, and formal characteristics when players are paid.<sup>165</sup> As we can see, in the case of Caillois, framing the debate of sport's moral fiber around the question of professionalism and amateurism is misguided and leads to logical problems when reflected upon with the understanding of sport's metaphysical nature.

Huizinga and Caillois both seem to believe that external motivation can override the intrinsic nature of 'play' and, hence, the mutual exclusivity both ascribe to their own definition of 'play.' This is not necessarily true, as seen in the case of "flow" studied by Csikszentmihalyi.<sup>166</sup> Flow is thought to be the perfect harmony between the player and the 'play' sphere when such a player singularly focuses upon the ultimate aim of the play activity.<sup>167</sup> The player truly enters the suspended time and space of the magic circle, unaware and completely detached from the realities of the ordinary. Flow is a state within the 'play' experience unmatched that we all strive toward, but seldom achieve. Nonetheless, it can be achieved at any level of sport, ranging from the professional to simple forms. An activity that makes the flow experience possible must be challenging, and the level of the game required to create the flow experience will improve as the player becomes more and more

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<sup>164</sup> Caillois, *p. 44*

<sup>165</sup> Henricks, *p. 170*

<sup>166</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975)

<sup>167</sup> Angela Schneider (2007). "Fair Play as Respect for the Game." W.J. Morgan et al. (Eds.) *Ethics in Sport* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2007) p. 131

skilled.<sup>168</sup> The difference between the professional and amateur is the external consequence of participation, not the quality of the 'play' experience. The idea of flow seems to debunk the idea of separation of external goods from the magic circle, because there are countless examples of professionals in 'flow.' I contend that these professionals are locked into a performance and not 'play.' By completing such skillful activity one can be experiencing something similar to flow when locked into the challenge of the tasks. They are not 'playing' but just achieving in goal-oriented form. In some ways flow represents the pinnacle of 'play.' If this is the case, it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish between the goals of the professional and amateur within the magic circle.

Despite the fact that flow is the pinnacle play experience shared by professionals and sincere players at their apex; the drastic shift in mindset towards means-ended conduct presents the fundamental problem. Something that was previously done for pleasure as an escape can become an obsession and obligation.<sup>169</sup> This shift in mindset towards means-ended conduct occurs when the universe of play is infringed upon by the real world. Essentially, assigning real consequences to trivial and playful acts, which results in the corruption of 'play.' The player is truly practicing a profession where they may experience flow. The existence of external goods don't change the game, or the magic circle, for those involved; they fundamentally changes the player's attitude to the point that he no longer plays but practices a profession. This is due to the omnidirectional means-ended approach infiltrating the consecrated space dedicated to the former players'

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<sup>168</sup> Schneider, "Fair Play as Respect for the Game" p. 131

<sup>169</sup> Caillois, p. 44

free pursuit of the play activity. Without the free inconsequential nature of the activity there exists, an extreme compulsion to win because the means-ended approach dictates such a singular pursuit. As we will come to find out in the next chapter, such a compulsion is wholly incompatible with the tenets of these early forms of 'play'.

## Chapter 5 Interrelationship of the Trio

### 5.1 Relationship of Play and Game

Defining the nature of play and its relationship within the 'tricky triad' represents the initial step in clarifying the process of drawing meaning from 'playing' sport. After Huizinga and Caillois produced workable definitions of what constitutes 'play,' it became important to consider the configurations that facilitate and foster 'play,' Caillois quickly touched upon the common example of games in his four-category typology outlined in Man, Play and Games. However, Caillois doesn't provide an account of the essence of 'games' like he does for the nature of play, where he specifically outlines the characteristics that delimit 'play.' Consequently, we are able to identify *who* can be involved in 'play', *what* its constitution is, *when* it occurs, and *where* it takes place. Games don't appear to follow the same model of necessary and sufficient conditions upon first glance. The category of 'game' contains a great deal of variability on the surface. Oftentimes Caillois' games seem completely dissimilar when contrasted to other games that fit within the broader 'game' category. For instance, Chinese checkers and Bocce ball are both considered games, but they vastly differ outside of the competitive structure that provide purpose to the concept of a 'game.' The competitive nature of both games appears to be the shared structural characteristic between 'game' and 'sport.' It seems quite possible that 'game' and 'sport' share the same necessary and sufficient conditions; however, 'game' encompasses a broader scope while 'sport' is more narrowly defined.

The concept of 'play' represents the most extensive range of possibility; therefore, it can be observed in most instances and appears to be common to both sports and games. Games are the logical choice to continue this paradigm because they encompass a greater range of possible examples, whereas, what could be considered sport is quite limited, even with the most liberal of sporting opinions. This sort of understanding differentiates the three concepts on a sort of continuum. In the context of mapping this relationship, the position of sport and games is determined simply by how often each concept can be recognized as part of human activity. 'Play' is completely different from games and sports because 'play' arises spontaneously and is not a constructed system unlike 'game' and 'sport,' that are contrived to bring about a type of play identified by Caillois. Therefore, we must clarify whether 'game' and 'sport' are concepts related by core similarities in their constitution, but distinguished by particular surface details; or, are they progressive variations emerging from the genus of 'play' to more specialized and distinct categories. Meier, at first, suggests the three exist on a continuum transitioning in the order of Play-Games-Sport.<sup>170</sup> Without a precise definition of the essence of sports and games, the question of what true 'play' is within 'sport' cannot be answered. The answer to this question of definition and the exact relationship with play is examined in Bernard Suits' book The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia as a response of sorts to the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations. Suits' definition brings 'game' into the light, further away from what he sees as the amorphous understanding of Wittgenstein, demonstrating its

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<sup>170</sup> Klaus Meier, "On the Inadequacies of Sociological Definitions of Sport," *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 2,16, (1982), p. 82.

undeniable connection to foundational play characteristics. However, Suits proposes his own refinements to the play definition. From this perspective we can begin to more accurately identify what games are and their place in the tricky triad. From Suits' position on play and games we can better analyze and produce a definition of playing sport amongst sport philosophers.

## 5.2 Forming a Revised Definition of Play

It is Suits' belief that Huizinga was essentially correct when he formulated the first definition of play. However, Suits attempts to strengthen the play definition by adding the qualification of 'autotelicity,' and delimiting it to the specific instances of 'play' in order to truly have a working concept of it.<sup>171</sup> Suits explained the nature of autotelicity existed entirely with the process not output. "Autotelic activities are activities which are ends in themselves."<sup>172</sup> Autotelicity is simply a greater standard for the separation of the 'play' environment from the surrounding ordinary. These practices are done simply because they are good in themselves and serve no other end but themselves. Suits suggests that all instances of 'play' are instances of autotelic activity.<sup>173</sup> However, he views autotelicity as a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for an adequate definition of 'play.'<sup>174</sup> Ultimately, Suits must conclude that 'play' and 'game' are logically distinct because of the separate definitions he has created for both concepts. The commonly held view of 'game' as a

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<sup>171</sup> Suits, "Words on Play," p. 125

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid* p. 117

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid* p. 119

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid* p. 119

species of 'play' is incorrect. Play is its own concept that certainly influences 'games' in a capacity, but it is important to understand that it is distinct from 'game' and 'sport.'

When we use the word 'play' we don't always limit it to its proper context and far too often attribute it to other concepts, which adds to the heightened confusion of the term. For example, Suits outlines that we commonly use the word play as an infinitive to describe things like performing with a violin, and operating a pinball machine.<sup>175</sup> The cross application of the word is unique because we don't lose any parts of the original meaning when used outside of its proper context.<sup>176</sup> This similarly applies to participation and playing a game. The existence of the expression 'playing a game' is not by itself a compelling reason for insisting that there is logical relation between playing and game-playing.<sup>177</sup>

Consider Suits' example of Johnny and his conduct while eating dinner.<sup>178</sup> It wouldn't be out of the ordinary to hear Johnny's mom instruct him to stop playing with his mashed potatoes. Describing Johnny's conduct as 'play' is completely within reason. However, defining it as game-play or a game while sitting in for family dinner seems nonsensical.<sup>179</sup> Without the elements of game Suits had originally outlined, Johnny's playful conduct doesn't meet criteria of 'game.' It could only be described as a primitive realm of 'play.' Conversely, in the opposite situation of a game, it appears implausible for everyone to be truly playing. When Huizinga

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<sup>175</sup> Suits, "Words on Play," p. 120

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid* p. 120

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid* p. 120

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid* p. 120

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid* p. 121

mentions the rise of the professional who plays sports for pay, we are not all inclined to conclude from that fact, that they are without qualification, playing.<sup>180</sup> Thomas Hurka, utilizes Suits' theory to conclude that being involved in a game doesn't constitute 'playing.' One simply must follow the rules to remain within the limits of the game in order to game-play. They need not accept rules for their own sake, just simply to make the activity possible.<sup>181</sup> Hence, when contrasting the professional athletes participation in sport alongside more innocent activities like playing with their own kids, only the latter seems to truly represent 'play.' The distinction here is best understood when the two are contrasted; therefore, Suits describes play and game-play as dependently identifiable.<sup>182</sup>

Suits supports his assertion of logical independence by suggesting,

The word play is used to designate the kind of thing Johnny does with his mashed potatoes when he is not getting down to the serious business of eating them, what is being designated is the kind of thing that is inherently relative to something else, but that game, when it is used to refer to such things as chess and basketball, is not.<sup>183</sup>

Play is understood primarily through comparisons with its opposite, seriousness, while 'game' doesn't appear to have an opposite counterpart. If we reflect back to Suits' example of Johnny, it appears that play carries the implication that mashed potatoes (in this instance) are involved in purposes foreign, to or inconsistent with, the way they are being utilized.<sup>184</sup> Following Johnny's dinner fun, he can also engage in play by going outside where he can do all sorts of amusing things. This play

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<sup>180</sup>Suits, "Words on Play," p. 120

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Hurka, "Games and the Good," W.J. Morgan et al. (Eds.) *Ethics in Sport* Champaign: Human Kinetics. (2007), p. 26

<sup>182</sup> Suits, "Words on Play," p. 120

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid* p. 120

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid* p. 121

seems different because Johnny has no instruments, but one detail remains unchanged. Johnny's behavior is autotelic, or done simply for its own sake and not any other. Play is concerned with the use of resources for which those resources were not initially intended, where the original allocation was for instrumental activities and now the new allocation is for autotelic activities.<sup>185</sup> From this Suits formulates a revised definition of play: "x is playing if and only if x has made a temporary reallocation to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes."<sup>186</sup>

If we revisit the case of Johnny's post dinner play time, it isn't immediately obvious what resource he is using by just frolicking in the yard. The resource need not only be instrumental, but one resource is common to all things and that is time.<sup>187</sup> As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, humans have a finite period of time, primarily used for the accomplishment of something worthwhile to the civilization or bettering it in some capacity. The concept of time is integral to play because means-ended pursuits are considered to be prioritized over autotelic play. Play only seems reasonable when time exists in a surplus, which is the case for kids, because they generally don't do much that's considered constructive with the time they have. However, adults understand the preciousness of time and the ridiculousness of wasting it and, hence, why excessive play can be viewed as absurd upon reaching a certain age of one's life. Therefore play is dependent upon the context of time when it is pursued as outlined by Suits.

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<sup>185</sup> Suits, *Words on Play*, p. 123

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid* p. 123

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid* p. 125

There are conditions under which it is proper to call various kinds of aesthetic enjoyment play: not however, merely because they are intrinsically valued pursuits, but because of the conditions under which such intrinsically valued activities are pursued. The conditions must be such that the time used for such pursuits is viewed in contrast to a situation in which that time ought to be used for an activity which has a higher claim upon it.<sup>188</sup>

### 5.3 Wittgenstein versus Suits on Games

Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations is a book unrelated to sport philosophy, but is significant because of his claims regarding the status of conceptual analysis of language and semantics. Wittgenstein asserts that some concepts like games don't have the determinate characteristics or sharp edges that conceptual analysis requires for arriving at a precise definition.<sup>189</sup> Wittgenstein suggests you don't need necessary and sufficient conditions to discover the essence of games because they are linked only by a looser set of family resemblances.<sup>190</sup> In other words, Wittgenstein argues against the idea of concrete definitions as it pertains to language and semantics. In order to prove his thesis of non-essential conditions correct, Wittgenstein provides an example in games that he believes to be in agreement with his reasoning. Using the example of games Wittgenstein posits,

Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board games, card games, ball games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? Don't say: There must be something common, or they would not be called games but look and see whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them you

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<sup>188</sup> Suits, "*Words on Play*," p. 125

<sup>189</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968) p. 31e

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid* p. 31e

will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.<sup>191</sup>

Wittgenstein observes elements that exist within some games, but vanish from others. The nature of ball games differs completely from the standpoint of requisite skill in chess, yet both are considered to be among the same classification in 'game.' Despite being more informal, tic-tac-toe requires some analytical skills similar to chess but lacks any sort of physical coordination. Last, a simple game of rock, paper, scissors doesn't require physical skills or analytical skills; otherwise, instead it is predicated entirely on luck. If one is correct in identifying all the pursuits above as games, despite their disparate workings, they can rely on Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance.' Instead of possessing a clear-cut characteristic, 'games' have a network of overlapping similarities. Consider the various resemblances between family members possessing distinct characteristics that aren't completely uniform, but possess enough similarity that they can be grouped as a family.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, surface elements like 'playfulness' and 'contest' create the definition according to Wittgenstein. Ultimately, games have the same qualities and cannot be completely atomized.

Bernard Suits account of 'game' directly opposes Wittgenstein's principal argument in Philosophical Investigations. Suits posits a framework that attempts to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions that comprise a game, the very thing Wittgenstein pronounced as impossible. Wittgenstein only notes the surface differences between games in his example without even wondering whether they

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<sup>191</sup> Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 32e

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid* p. 31e

may not be consistent with deeper commonality.<sup>193</sup> In The Grasshopper Suits constructs an ironclad argument proving the analysis of Wittgenstein incorrect, while identifying the components that define a game's structure and the nature of 'game-play' and playing games.

Suits begins The Grasshopper by underscoring the dichotomous relationship between games and work. Within this distinction lies a difference in the attitude with which one approaches the respective endeavour. Since work revolves around practicality, the worker will endeavour to use the most efficient means possible to complete the goal.<sup>194</sup> Conversely, the means chosen by the player are not of similar efficiency, but complete inefficiency.<sup>195</sup> Suits uses the especially apt example of golf to prove the idea of inefficiency in game. Ultimately, the goal is to get the golf ball in the designated hole, but a practical worker would simply walk over and place the ball in the hole to fulfill this task.<sup>196</sup> In contrast, we see that we employ truly inefficient means when playing golf. We use a variety of clubs that are impractical when compared with the former means of the worker. Compounding the inefficiency of the means employed, is the fact that getting the ball in the hole doesn't constitute the entire goal of the activity.<sup>197</sup> One must also use the least number of strokes accomplishing this goal, as oppose to simply completing the task quickest.<sup>198</sup> Such a restriction requires calculated precision and forethought from

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<sup>193</sup> Bernard Suits. The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2005) p. 12

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid* p. 37

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid* p. 38

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid* p. 38

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid* p. 42

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid* p. 42

the player, unlike the worker who uses efficiency to remove such an unnecessary burden. The inefficient means become legislated through the rules governing the activity making them paramount to the game's structure. Suits asserts that value exist in the process not output. "Rules in games thus seem to be in some sense inseparable from ends, for to break a game rule is to render impossible the attainment of an end."<sup>199</sup> Therefore, the completion of game activity cannot be considered independent of the means used to arrive at that end. The mode one chooses is equally, if not more, important than the end itself. Doing the task in the inefficient manner prescribed creates the possibility of the activity, not just completing the end task. In the example of billiards, one cannot begin indiscriminately shooting balls at one's own convenience. Although sinking the billiard balls, resembles the task the player is charged with in a billiards game, it can't be classified as a true game of billiards. The inefficiency of dealing with impediments and sinking the eight ball defines billiards. Without these elements, it could still be a form of billiards, but not the true game as constituted, according to Suits.

The definition of games isn't solely comprised of the inefficiency constituted by the rules. An additional aspect of motivation, to freely comply with the rules, is just as important, if not more so than the proscriptions themselves according to Suits. Suits proposes that the player obeys the rules just because such obedience is a necessary condition for engaging in the activity; and such obedience allows the

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<sup>199</sup> Suits, The Grasshopper, p. 39

game to become possible.<sup>200</sup> Citing the example of high jump, Suits explains that high jumpers don't employ any type of means to cross the barrier but choose to restrict themselves to the method used to do so voluntarily.<sup>201</sup> Suit's views the value of 'playing' games from the standpoint of the process. Their reason for accepting such rules is just because they want to act within the limitations of the rules imposed. They accept rules so that they can play a game, and they accept these rules so that they can play this game.<sup>202</sup> The rationale for following the rules doesn't derive from any sort of means-ended calculation, but is simply due to the fact that they simply want to high jump. In being a high jumper one doesn't restrict the modes of efficiency for topping the bar for any greater moral importance, but just because they simply want to high jump.<sup>203</sup> With respect to morals, obedience to the rules makes an action right, but in games it defines the action.<sup>204</sup>

The concept of inefficiency and obedience to the rules proposed construct the inner workings of a game. The end sought in the form of the game cannot simply be to win. There must be an end which is distinct from winning because it is the restriction of means to this other end that makes winning possible, and also defines, in any given game, what it means to win.<sup>205</sup> In defining a game we shall therefore, have to take into account these two ends and a third one as well. First, there is the end, which consists simply in a certain state of affairs requiring resolution. Then, when a restriction of means for attaining this end is made with the introduction of

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<sup>200</sup>Suits, The Grasshopper p. 45

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid* p. 45

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid* p. 46

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid* p. 46

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid* p. 46

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid* p. 47

rules, we have a second end, winning. Finally, with the stipulation of what it means to win, a third end emerges: the activity of trying to win - that is, playing the game.<sup>206</sup> It is important to point out that games don't require us to operate inefficiently in our pursuit of victory.<sup>207</sup> However, they do require us to operate inefficiently in trying to achieve that state of affairs, which counts as winning only when it is accomplished according to the rules of the game.<sup>208</sup> For the way in which those rules function is to prohibit use of the most efficient means for achieving the game's state of affairs.

Suits' abbreviated definition states, "To play a game is to engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity."<sup>209</sup>

## 5.4 The Elements of Game

From this definition we get the elements of game for Suits. The four characteristics identified by Suits directly refute Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis. Games aren't characterized by surface similarities, but in fact possess essential conditions universal to all games. These four characteristics proposed by Suits give a precise account of the structures forming games. Suits' definition suggests games

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<sup>206</sup> Suits, The Grasshopper, p. 48

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid* p. 48

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid* p. 48

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid* p. 49

universally contain a task to be achieved, means limited by inefficiency, and rules. However, the final characteristic described as the play attitude is the uniting force giving meaning to the absurd. Suits titles the four characteristics as lusory goal, lusory means, constitutive rules, and lusory attitude.<sup>210</sup>

The lusory goal is the first element of Suits's definition. It refers to the specific state of affairs the player is engaged in. The player attempts to achieve the lusory goal in order to complete the end sought within the activity. For example, consider the game of basketball where the lusory goal requires the player's team to score more points than they give up in the allotted period. However, often sports are more nuanced incorporating a series of smaller hurdles that culminate in the lusory goal. Suits describes these hurdles as pre-lusory goals<sup>211</sup> which helps to clarify how we bring about a specific resolution to our state of affairs. To continue with the basketball example, the pre-lusory goal would be scoring on the opponent's goal by putting the ball through the hoop in any of the three possible point amounts. The pre-lusory goal must be fulfilled in a particularly inefficient way in order to qualify as a game as asserted by Suits in The Grasshopper.

The lusory means are the specific manner outlined in which conduct by the player is deemed permissible in achieving the pre-lusory goal.<sup>212</sup> In basketball it would be much easier to carry the ball directly to the hoop and climb a ladder so that you may easily place the ball in the basket, but this opposes the notion of inefficiency. In order to successfully win or play a game, a player must adhere to the

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<sup>210</sup> Bernard Suits, "The Elements of Sport," W.J. Morgan et al. (Eds.) Ethics in Sport. (Champaign: Human Kinetics 2007), p. 9

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid* p. 10

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid* p. 11

means because the lusory goal can't be achieved independent of the means allowed. Otherwise, it ceases to be basketball because inefficient basketball acts such as shooting, dribbling, and passing no longer exist. The completion of pre-lusory goals cannot be considered independent of the lusory means used to arrive at the ultimate lusory goal. The means you choose are equally, if not more important than the lusory goal itself when 'playing' a game. Adhering to these means allows the game to become possible, because it's not the goal that defines the game, but the commitment to doing the activity in the precise manner possible, while reaching that goal, that constitutes a game.

The third element of a game is the rules. They exist in three possible forms beginning with rules of skill, constitutive rules, and regulative rules.<sup>213</sup> Rules of skill are not critical to the game, but they do outline how one best goes about doing the task in a widely-accepted manner. Constitutive rules refer to the essential rules like court size, number of players, and equipment, forcing players to conform their actions to be in accordance with the means. Regulative rules are a subset of constitutive rules that essentially serve to proscribe certain undesirable behaviors by carrying a fixed penalty, quite often adding a secondary tactical element beyond the rules of skill. The rules form a constitution presupposing the players will adhere to the lusory means, therefore limiting the method of going about achieving the lusory goal. In basketball constitutive rules exist, therefore, to optimize the flow of the game through the dimensions of the court, type, and an allotted number of fouls, all in addition to the limitation of five players actively participating per squad.

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<sup>213</sup> Suits, "*The Elements of Sport*," p. 11

Secondary rules exist, like travelling and double dribble, meant to enforce the lusory means that circumscribe the game.

Last, but certainly not least, in Suits' theory on games, is the characteristic of lusory attitude. Above all it's the single most important concept in determining how games relate to 'play.' With respect to the nature of games, people have an intuitive understanding that the goal is the end to the game. However, they recognize a crucial part of 'game' is embracing this roundabout method of achieving the goal, which runs contrary to the means-ended approach. Using the basketball example again, nothing really prevents the player from travelling with the ball, or using unnatural means like climbing a ladder, to score field goals. Quite simply the player embraces the unnecessary difficulty these impediments pose, and as a result, unique skills form a way of overcoming these voluntary obstacles. The player has a fundamentally different mentality than a person demonstrating practical judgment. By participating with a lusory attitude, the three prior characteristics of Suits' theory merge into playful activity, due to the player's decision to do the activity for itself. Play is directly attributed to the lusory attitude, which is the result of the player's having the perfect storm of self-delusion and frivolity from their perspective. Such an undertaking couldn't be play without these qualities.

## 5.5 Tricky Triad

The definition of a game proposed by Suits is a tremendous building block in the tricky triad debate. Prior to Suits' definition, Wittgenstein's family resemblances

thesis complicated the nature of our understanding of games. However, more importantly, Suits' Elements of Games eliminates any lingering ambiguity between the relationship of 'game' and 'play.' Wittgenstein's family resemblances proposal complicates our understanding of how 'play' exactly relates to 'game.' This statement furthers the possibility that 'play' and 'game' could be conjoined. One can be described as 'playing' a 'game,' but this simply adapts the defined concept, previously explored by Huizinga and Caillois as noun, to actively describing the verb on how one properly goes about conducting oneself in a 'game;' not describing essential qualities of 'play.' Suits' complete definition of the elements of game proves that games are structurally designed to create and promote the play characteristics outlined by Huizinga and Caillois. Within a 'game' the player must accept the lusory means and state of inefficiency, otherwise it becomes impossible to discover enhanced intrinsic meaning associated with choosing to perform the activity that way. What is being done can't be considered 'play', but an impractical goal oriented endeavor. It is important to note here that the relationships between 'game' and 'play' are not as simple as Suits suggests. With complete understanding of both of Suits' definitions of 'play' and 'game,' one can rationally conclude that a logical independence exists between the two.

Following the completed definitions of 'play' and 'game,' we can progress to the ultimate aim of 'sport.' Play carries an indispensable role in the concept of game; however, we must maintain a logical distinction to avoid conflation. This helps to further clarify the interrelationship within the tricky triad. The final component on the continuum as proposed by Meier, is 'sport', and by defining its

essence we will finally clarify whether the tricky triad works together in a sort of progression as a continuum as alleged by Meier.

Subsequent to Suits' revolutionary definition of a game, he proposed that, "Sports are essentially games" with four points of qualification.<sup>214</sup> Suits criteria for a game goes as follows; "Sport must contain elements of skill, the skills in question must be of a physical nature, the sport must have a sufficient following, and have sufficient degree of institutionalization."<sup>215</sup> Outside of these four additional requirements Suits' considered the internal construction of game and sport essentially the same.<sup>216</sup> However, he also posits at a later point in in time, that sport is not a species within the genus game.<sup>217</sup> Despite the inconsistency Suits adapts his position to move away from viewing game and sport as identical because of critical flaws involving the third and fourth point of qualification. If sport is required to be institutionalized, the genesis of an activity cannot come to pass as sport, because not everything can be institutionalized. Sport often is conjured up spontaneously; therefore, at some point it passes a threshold to become institutionalized. Sport is better understood along an organizational continuum from relative absence of such aspects to that of extreme regulation.<sup>218</sup> Second, the degree and duration of 'the following' associated with the sport in question is a difficult benchmark to set with any degree of accuracy.<sup>219</sup> Using popularity in this manner to define athletic games

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<sup>214</sup> Suits, "*The Elements of Sport.*" p. 14

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid* p. 14

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid* p. 14

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid* p. 14

<sup>218</sup> Meier, "*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game.*" p. 15

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid* p. 15

from games, is quite arbitrary and unsatisfactory due to variability.<sup>220</sup> It would be quite arbitrary to mandate a particular temporal period, while considering an eternity seems unreasonable due to the reliability of change with successive generations. As a consequence of these errors Suits alters his understanding of the tricky triad to evolve the definition of sport and play, while retaining his current definition of game.<sup>221</sup>

After Suits renounces his original position (which in fact, is the one that Meier ultimately embraces in the end) regarding the similarities of game and sport, he uncovers a distinction between types of sport utilizing a Venn Diagram as will be shown later in this section. According to Suits, sport is comprised of two different types of competitive events: sports in the form of a refereed contest, and sports in the form of a judged performance.<sup>222</sup> One is a performance and so requires judges, while the other exists as rule-governed interplay involving participants with rules enforced by referees to fairly determine the winner.<sup>223</sup> For example, consider rhythmic gymnastics. Furthermore, differences exist in the types of rules regulating judged versus refereed sports. In refereed sports, the artificial barriers are erected just so they can be overcome by the use of rule-governed skills.<sup>224</sup> Rules are the crux of games because it is the rules of any particular game that generates the skills appropriate to that game.<sup>225</sup> Conversely, judged events don't have constitutive rules, but rather favor rules of skill. In the example of rhythmic gymnastics the rules

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<sup>220</sup> Meier, "*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game.*" p. 16

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid* p. 18

<sup>222</sup> Suits, "*Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport,*" p. 5

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid* p. 5

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid* p. 5

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid* p. 5

guiding the competition are those of skill, which should be considered akin to a method of best practice.

The definition of 'sport' is more complex than it was when it was first envisioned. Refereed base sports are the same as a game, sharing some basic characteristics, but judged performances possess others characteristics that are no less different from the structure of 'game'. Klaus Meier's Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game serves as a rebuttal to Suits' article Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport, supporting Suits' original assertion that all sports are games with the only qualification being a requirement of physical skill. He utilizes an Euler Diagram, as will be shown later in this section. His support is linked with a revision of an error Suits makes in relation to the idea of the rules governing judged performances. Meier claims that Suits is wrong to suggest that judged performances are not subject to rules like referee dependent sport (Meier, p. 20).<sup>226</sup> Meier recounts Suits' parable of Ivan and Abdul's no holds barred fight to the finish in The Grasshopper.<sup>227</sup> Ivan doesn't immediately destroy Abdul upon consenting to fight, which suggests adherence to a time restriction, which is tantamount to a rule. This parallels with judged performances, and the previous example of rhythmic gymnastics, where the competition is guided by a designated routine time limit, change over, and order. However, I feel it is important to turn our attention to the aim of the performance, and the possibility that Suits overlooks the importance of regulative rules within performance sport. In the Elements of Sport Suits identifies the three types of rules: constitutive, regulative, and skill. The rules combine to

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<sup>226</sup> Meier, "Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game," p. 20

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid* p. 19

compose the conduct of what one should do in a game; however each one has a distinct function. If some constitutive rules aren't followed, they carry penalties, which serve as our regulative rule. When reconsidering judged performance sports, a player must not only adhere to rules of skill, but also regulative rules that are imposed by the judges. Suits was certainly right about the scarcity of constitutive rules in performance sport, as they seldom exist, but that doesn't necessarily result in the exclusion of the performance sport from the category of 'game.' Suits grossly overlooked regulative rules because if a performer fails to perfectly demonstrate a rule of skill, the duty of the judge is to charge the performer with a regulative penalty, ultimately reducing their score. Therefore, it can be argued that judged athletic performances are essentially the same as refereed sport because they both contain the original criteria of the Elements of Game, simplifying the definition we use to define sport. Therefore, all sports are games with the added qualification of a physical skill can be summarized as, "Physical activity that is either essentially judged or essentially officiated. Sports are performances that follow a script and are judged. Sports are games that have a pre-lusory goal, follow rules, and are officiated."<sup>228</sup>

I have set out to reach satisfactory definitions for each of play, game, and sport from the sport philosophy literature. If we are in agreement as to the nature of definitions we now are equipped with the appropriate provisions to embark on answering the question of interrelationship between Play-Sport-Game.

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<sup>228</sup> Angela Schneider, "Fruits, Apples, and Category Mistakes: On Sport, Games, and Play." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. XXVII, (2001): p. 153

## 5.6 Interrelationships of Tricky Triad

The definition of 'game' and 'sport' advanced by Suits suggests that the occurrence of 'play' isn't as straightforward as Huizinga and Caillois originally anticipated. The game definition outlined by Suits, presents a distinction between 'play' and conduct required to make a 'game' possible, as being quite different. One can play a sport by simply by following the rules; however, those who 'play' sport create their own meaning through an altered sense of participation. Based on the agreed definition by Suits, namely, that all 'sports' are essentially a specific type of 'game' with the addition of physical skill, sports are subject to the same to same problem as stated above. The possibility arises that a participant can submit themselves to the rules for the sake doing the activity for some end that lies external to the actual activity. Players must exhibit autotelicity, similar to that of Johnny, in order for their behavior to be truly considered as play; otherwise, it is for something else outside the play world.

With clear and exact definitions of the components of the tricky triad we can now begin to arrange the framework of their interrelationship. Previously I spoke to the Play-Games-Sport continuum proposed by Meier, who initially suggested,

That considerable agreement within the literature supports the concept of a continuum extending from play to games and further to sports. The Play-Game-Sport continuum suggests, in general, that play activities gradually evolve in game and/or sport with the transition characterized by decreasing spontaneity and freedom in the direction of progressive formalization and increasing regulation, achievement orientation, habituation, and institutionalization.<sup>229</sup>

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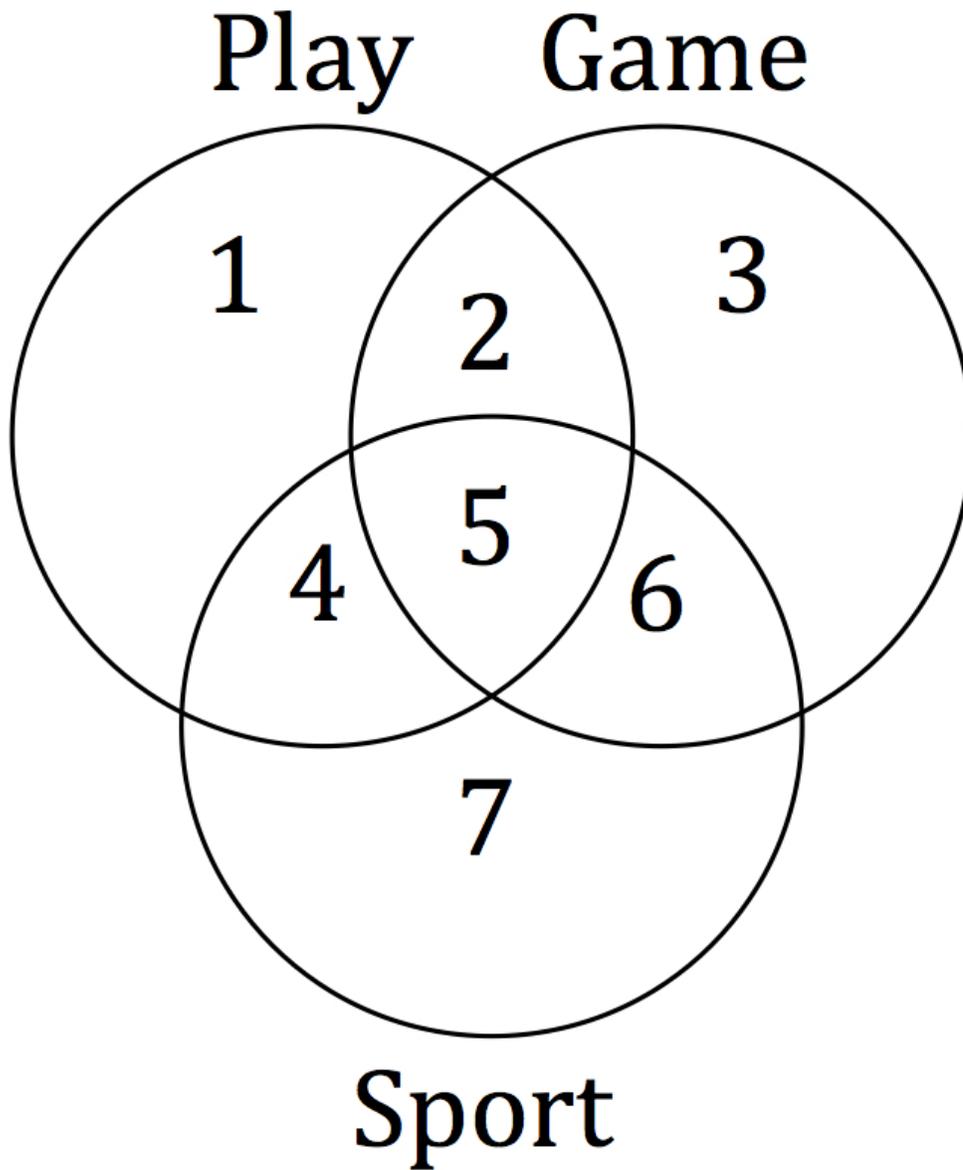
<sup>229</sup> Meier, *"On the Inadequacies of Sociological Definitions of Sport,"* p. 90

The continuum model pays heed to the surface understanding of the tricky triad; however the logic is fatally flawed. The model requires 'play' to be progressively rooted out of 'game' to the point of elimination upon reaching 'sport.' While the earlier definition I described as partially correct, in considering 'game' and 'sport' synonymous, the relation with play torpedoes both models. The suggestion that play is more accurately characterized as an attitude or stance adopted toward any given activity, such that the presence of this stance renders the endeavor one of play and the absence of this attitude disqualifies the activity as one of play.<sup>230</sup> In sum, game or sport need not be exclusively played, they still allow attitudes that are not play to be exhibited within the confines of the game. To better illustrate the relationship of the tricky triad Suits uses a Venn diagram to represent the three distinct concepts and their relationships provided below.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Deborah Vossen, "The Nature and Classification of Games," *Avante*. Ottawa, Ontario. Vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), p. 64

Figure 2 Bernard Suits' Venn Diagram of Tricky Triad.<sup>232</sup>



1. Primitive Play
2. Sophisticated Play
3. Professional Non-Athletic Games
4. Amateur Performances

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<sup>232</sup> Suits, "Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport," p. 9

5. Amateur Sport
6. Professional Sport
7. Professional Athletic Performances

With respect to Suits' Venn diagram, there are couple of points that I take issue with; however, the choice of the Venn diagram provides the best method of depicting the interrelationship of the tricky triad presented as equal and related concepts over that of Meier's initial continuum model. The three distinct circles overlap one another to show areas of commonality between one, two, or all three concepts. By assembling the Venn diagram in a manner that expresses relative equality between the three entities, Suits is claiming here that some sports, namely, entirely judged ones are not games. But, if as argued by Meier, and originally by Suits, all sports are in fact games, area 4 and 7 on the diagram can't logically exist if we've determined sports exist within the category of games.<sup>233</sup> However, the strength of Suits' Venn diagram proves the continuum concept to be less accurate. Play either exists or doesn't within games and sport; a dual nature to going about the activity exists when considering Suits' play definition requirement of autotelicity. The possibility of simply engaging in sport or games for reasons external to the sake of doing it simply for itself exists, and for this reason the diagram is suitable for representing that relationship. Thus, the context plays a greater role than the content of the activity when participating.<sup>234</sup> Meier, using Suits' original definitions, eventually corrected the inaccuracies of the Venn diagram

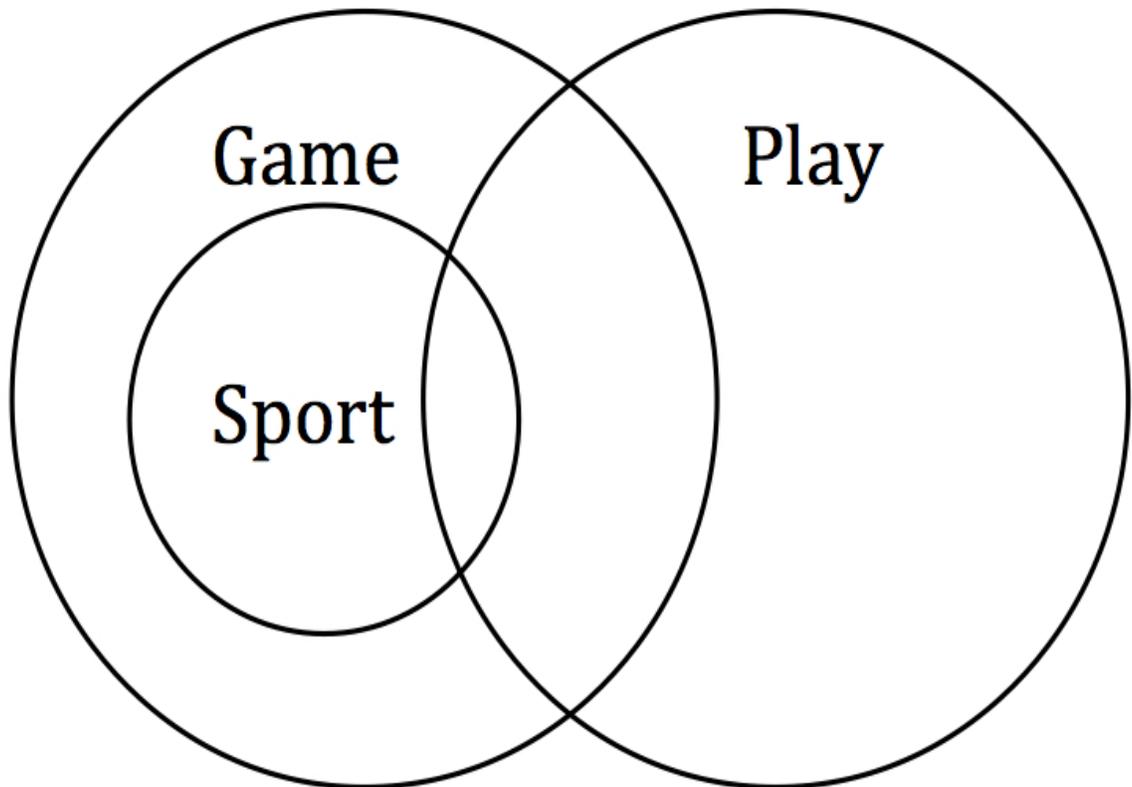
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<sup>233</sup> Meier, "*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game*," p. 24

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid* p. 25

relationship offered by Suits, by revising the scope of sport and repositioning it within games using the Euler Diagram below.<sup>235</sup>

Figure 3 Klaus Meier’s Euler Diagram of the Tricky Triad<sup>236</sup>



The Euler Diagram more accurately presents the precise relationship of sports and games according to the accepted fact that all sports are indeed games presented by Suits (original position). By incorporating the area representing sport within the domain of play, the logical inconsistency of the position of (4) and (7) within Figure 2. no longer present logical trouble when the “tricky triad” is modified into the Euler Diagram.

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<sup>236</sup> Meier, “*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game*,” p. 26

Contrary to the continuum model, Suits' and Meier's (later version) illustrations successfully demonstrate the complexity of the interrelationship with the tricky triad as outlined.<sup>237</sup> 'Play' exists as the wild card in the framework, either present or absent. In the continuum model, the idea of a range in play is challenged by the nature of the more precise sport philosophy definitions of each concept as demonstrated by the Venn and Euler Diagrams through plotting their interrelationship. Meier's diagram (based on Suits' original definition) is most accurate primarily because he eliminates sport as an individual entity distinct from game. Meier depends on Suits' game definition and uses it to illustrate the interrelationship most comprehensively, whereas, Suits does not in his own Venn diagram (of his latter definition). In sum, Meier's diagram demonstrates that a game is any activity involving a pre-lusory goal, lusory means, constitutive rules, and lusory attitude. While sports are essentially games requiring physical skill, when play represents the stance of intrinsic appreciation of an activity.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, I have used Suits definition of 'game' and 'play' to arrive at the conclusion that 'sport' can be considered as 'play' or non-'play' depending entirely upon the particular attitude adopted by a participant. However, Suits' latter definition of sport has been rejected. Suits' and Meier's illustration of the interrelationship allows for a clearer elucidation of the spirit of play, and has been accepted as a superior account over that is provided by the play-game-sport continuum model in philosophy of sport.

Although, our understanding of the interrelationship within tricky triads has improved, logical imperfections persist in our understanding. According to

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<sup>237</sup> Meier, "*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game*," p. 26

<sup>238</sup> Vossen, "*The Nature and Classification of Games*," p. 64

Schneider, both Suits and Meier commit a category mistake while defining the tricky triad.<sup>239</sup> Schneider outlines differences between attitude and activity, which carries implications for play. “A category mistake assumes something belongs to one type, or logical category, when really it belongs to another.”<sup>240</sup> According to Schneider, “Play is [similarly] a mode of performing action rather than a type of action.”<sup>241</sup> Within the two previous definitions for the tricky triad, both Suits and Meier define ‘playing’ sport through two different methods that don’t correspond sensibly. Both Suits and Meier define sport using the framework Suits constructed for game on a conceptual level. They also agree that the particular participant’s attitudinal approach is central to the play element as proven through the example of Johnny and the mash potatoes. Such a way of assigning the play concept avoids the logical impediments that confronted Huizinga and Caillois by using compensation (Amateur versus Professional) as the deciding factor. However, “It is not monetary rewards that make the difference but rather the change in attitude of the participant.”<sup>242</sup> By reframing the professional versus amateur designation to one that describes the personal reasons for participation, we easily avoid conceptual ruts that lie in waiting. As Suits outlined towards the end of Words on Play, the amateur athlete, in strict terms, can pursue victory so compulsively that it represents the entire undertaking, transforming something resembling play into

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<sup>239</sup> Schneider, “*Fruits, Apples, and Category Mistakes: On Sport, Games, and Play*,” p. 151

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid* p. 152

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid* p. 152

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid* p. 154

something that is exclusively means-ended activity.<sup>243</sup> Meier establishes that sports and games exist independent of play, but play may deepen the significance of the activity for the player.<sup>244</sup> But as pointed out by Schneider, “From this account, we can deduce that play has nothing to do with the structure of the activity and everything to do with the attitude to the player. However, certain structures may encourage some attitudes and discourage others; while logically distinct, the levels may be casually interconnected.”<sup>245</sup>

Schneider points out that a conceptual problem exists when plotting play in the relationship of game and sport using Venn and Euler diagrams. We attempt to define what something is by comparing its qualities to the essence of the definition we have set out. Most notably the definition of game allows us to identify particular activities as being game; however, the criteria used for play is incompatible with the diagram method. Where ‘game’ and ‘sport’ must have the four qualities that define the game in addition to that of physical skill, play is circumscribed by the autotelic *attitude*. The diagram is used to plot the category where a specific activity would fall under, however play itself poses a problem. Schneider claims that, the question, “is rugby ‘play’?” in fact does not make any sense because it is not defined by the same set of criteria. The question can only be answered from the micro level of the individual, that is to say, the question should be “is *that* rugby player “playing?”<sup>246</sup> A game or sport itself doesn’t embody play, people do; so the question in that context is unanswerable. A logical independence exists again proving Meier’s earlier

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<sup>243</sup> Suits, “*Words on Play*,” p. 129

<sup>244</sup> Meier, “*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game*,” p. 27

<sup>245</sup> Schneider, p. 156

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid* p. 157

assertion correct with respect to the fact the sport and games need not necessarily be 'played.'<sup>247</sup> One must simply submit to the inefficiency of the activity along with adhering to the means and rules, to be able to participate in a game.

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<sup>247</sup> Meier, "*Triad Trickery: Playing with Sport and Game*," p. 29

## Chapter 6: The Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

Throughout the course of this paper I have attempted to lead the reader on a long winding odyssey on how the uniquely human concept of sport generates added significance that stems from the simple decision to 'play.' Sports are important because they present a method of finding intrinsic meaning within our own embodiment that otherwise is not always available to us through sensible means-ended conduct. Sport presents a universal connection that most can relate to when it is played sincerely. This is primarily due the shared collective experience of 'play' everyone has participated in at one time or another. Among those 'playing' for the genuine love of the game, competition, or challenge there is a period that exists where ordinary precepts pertaining to purposive and rational human action are discarded for the seemingly nonsensical. All in favor of temporarily living within a very specific moment with behavior that can be only described as curious, if perceived by an ordinary outsider. All of one's being is dedicated to something that is meaningless from the perspective of practicality. The paradoxical behavior of such people brings into question the critical element of play. What other phenomenon could possibly explain such actions alien to sensible mature people with the benefit of a means-ended outlook? The tragedy of our day is forming one's understanding of the world solely from a means-ended perspective and applying it in cases where it is incompatible e.g. the absurdity of playing games. This is the issue I raise regarding the numerous stakeholders within contemporary sport who

can't see beyond this viewpoint to recognize the importance of play, in and of itself, within sport and the deep enduring intrinsic meaning associated with it.

Both Huizinga and Caillois firmly establish, through their respective theories, that play is an important naturally occurring phenomenon for all sentient beings. Their seminal works produce a definition for the concept of play where it was previously studied in academic disciplines, which neglected its phenomenological nature. Where Huizinga and Caillois succeed is from the point of isolating the unique characteristics of play and inferring what it is that provides its importance. Both authors use formal analysis to differentiate play from the other. Huizinga demonstrates incredible breadth proving that elements of play can exist under every rock in our social landscape.<sup>248</sup> Huizinga's purpose was to demonstrate how the play element spawns culture. Therefore, his focus wasn't to 'narrow' play to a specific application, but to identify its constitution through cross application. Identifying similarities allowed Huizinga to begin formulating his definition through parallels between play concepts previously thought to be unrelated, for example war and philosophy. Huizinga dedicates a chapter to exploring the characteristics of play in each of these cultural forms often thought of as profoundly serious. By way of Huizinga's analysis, one can better realize that the conduct within the context of war in the Middle Ages appears to be governed by the same play framework guiding the philosophy first practiced in Hellenic times between the philosopher Socrates

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<sup>248</sup> Suits, "*Words on Play*." p. 117

and sophist Protagoras.<sup>249</sup> Huizinga's definition of play provides an exceptional foundation to begin refining the significance of the play phenomenon.

Beginning in the wake of Huizinga, Caillois made his own contribution by specifically identifying the types and ways our behavior exists as 'play.' The sense of structure Caillois provides goes beyond the simple definitional characteristic of identifying play. It provides the next step of classifying it according different qualities, demonstrating that a variety of different kinds of conduct can be reduced to a similar experience of play. While Caillois successfully proves the wide range within the concept of play, it becomes clear that it can be commonly confused with 'game' as we witness in his chapter on classification. Often he switches back and forth between the different concepts of play and games. Caillois' theory also contributes to the confusion of these two concepts, leading to a logical interdependence, where no such connection necessarily exists. Play and game are separate concepts; however play certainly adds to the meaning of a game for a participant. The evidence of conflation allowed us to better understand the metaphysics of sport, and what more precisely, we are truly doing when we engage in it. Without this clarity, a nebulous relationship of the concepts of sport, game, and play prevails, preventing us from identifying what specific characteristics become important within the practice. Therefore, each concept must be understood in and of itself, and subsequent to this understanding, we can find meaning within the practice.

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<sup>249</sup> Huizinga, p. 147

It has been my position in this study that the meaning inherent to this human practice stems from the existential nature of play and sport. We have commonly ascribed value from the standpoint of grouping it under the umbrella of play and the unique characteristics that define the concept. This is a result of our overall confusion and conflation of these concepts. Upon flushing out the important and unique qualities of play we misunderstand the meaning of the concept through a natural relation to work, and the distinguishing characteristics that separate it from the ordinary means-ended activity. I assert that we must overhaul how we attach meaning to our participation in sport. This is better understood through a clear understanding of concepts critical to philosophy of sport and appreciation for the process, and not solely the output. This speaks to the inherent value we have in our lives that derives from intrinsic choice. The practice of sport is absurd, but when reveling in the absurd in such an intelligent way with rules, prescriptions, and proscriptions, a sense of human consciousness remains within the activity. By managing to understand that the activity is utterly meaningless from the standpoint of the ordinary, while recognizing the importance of adhering to rules of the activity, a unique opportunity presents itself to find meaning through existence, self-determination, and embodiment in a deeply personal way.

Engagement of play and sport can provide us with obvious inherent meaning. Through a contrast with the absurd hero Sisyphus, we can better understand that despite the obstacle or task, intrinsic meaning presents itself in our endeavors. The difference is the added significance of the intrinsic meaning of play. The player simply experiences a heightened intrinsic meaning because of the unique personal

characteristic of the play concept that I acknowledged through the writings of Huizinga and Caillois.

By recognizing the deeply subjective world of the player with objective understanding that tempers the immediacy of their play, its importance becomes critical. Nagel's concept of the view from nowhere, cited by Feezell, is critical to maintaining the partition between two different very real worlds of the player. Without playful irony, the absurdity of the play sphere would collapse and what was once a unique space becomes no different from the ordinary.

From here we are better able to reevaluate the tricky triad and its interrelationships. The philosopher Suits, provides his own changes to the concept of play, but his greatest contribution, in my opinion in this regard, is his masterful definition of a game's constitution. From here it can be realized that sport and games are very similar, outside of a principal feature of physical prowess. The sport philosopher Meier demonstrates that Suits was right the first time with his definition of sport. And the sport philosopher, Schneider, demonstrates that both Suits and Meier commit a category mistake by trying to put the concept of 'play' into Venn and Euler Diagrams with sport and game. However, through Suits' definition of sport it becomes clear that attitude plays a larger role in defining what we do, than the absurdity of our actions. One can fully comply with the structure of participating in games without truly playing them. Obviously, they would have an especially impoverished view of the practice, but, nonetheless, such actions remain squarely within the realm of possibility. It is only through combining the play

mentality with the action of sport that we can derive true meaning within the practice.

## 6.2 Meaning of Play

The special meaning of play exists in the fact that we exercise choice and self-determination when determining how we will go about finding our true essence. It means something that we are flawed, inconsistent, and possess an imperfect sense of control over ourselves as we go through quotidian life. However, sport presents an opportunity to close the gap between what the mind wants and what the body can realize. Constantly, we can struggle to complete the most insignificant task but, when it is accomplished, with this type synchronicity, there are few intrinsic feelings that can surmount this experience. We better discover who we are as individuals, our breaking points, and strength not ordinarily exhibited in other arenas. Who we are as players provide a “touchstone,”<sup>250</sup> as pointed out by Delattre, to measure the quality of ourselves as we continue on each day because the player represents a form of ourselves we don’t ordinarily realize. People aren’t perfect but within the crucible that is sport you can better realize who your are and the mettle you consist of.

Through the course of this thesis I have connected how the metaphysics of sporting activity corresponds, to the meaning and influence of play. The ideals of sport and the player connect with the existential and reveal that play is one of the best ways of discovering intrinsic meaning within our lives.

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<sup>250</sup> Edwin Delattre, “Some Reflections on Success and Failure in Competitive Athletics,” W.J. Morgan et al. (Eds.) *Ethics in Sport*. (Champaign: Human Kinetics 2007), p. 197

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