



ANDY BAGGOT

Ten reasons why 'sports' aren't sports

We need to get something straight here before things get out of hand.

Not everything you see on a certain all-sports cable TV network is necessarily a sport.

For some reason, people are actually debating whether the World Series of Poker and the National Spelling Bee, recent fixtures on ESPN, are sports.

Yeah, and Al Franken is going to replace Dick Cheney as President Bush's running mate.

I can understand the confusion. There seems to be a lot more "activities" trying to pass themselves off as actual sports these days, stuff like disc golf, ice dancing and cheerleading.

It doesn't help that the dictionary definition of "sport" leaves a lot open to interpretation.

"An activity involving physical exertion and skill, governed by rules or customs and often undertaken competitively" could mean basketball to you and me, but it could just as easily mean a belching contest to someone else.

To try to make the line less blurry, I have come up with 10 guidelines for identifying a real sport. It's been expanded and updated from the one I provided a few years ago.

1. If you can drink alcohol and smoke a cigar while competing, then it's not a sport. Examples: Horseshoes, golf, bass fishing.
2. If the winner is determined solely by the work of judges, then it's not a sport. Examples: Gymnastics, figure skating, cheerleading, ballroom dancing.
3. If an animal dies or does the heavy lifting, then it's not a sport. Examples: Iditarod, horse racing, hunting.
4. If you sit on your butt for hours at a time, then it's not a sport. Examples: Chess, poker.
5. If an engine does the work, then it's not a sport. Examples: Auto, truck, boat and motorcycle racing.
6. If you wear a watch, long pants and a collared shirt while competing, then it's not a sport. Examples: Pool, bowling.
7. If there's a script, then it's not a sport. Examples: WWE, RAW.
8. It's possible to be an athlete, but yours may not be a sport. Gymnasts, golfers, cheerleaders and rodeo clowns are good examples of this.
9. The need for great eye-hand coordination doesn't automatically mean it's a sport. That's why marbles, juggling and croquet are out.
10. Competing against someone doesn't automatically mean it's a sport. If it did, getting the number of the woman at the end of the bar before your buddy would have leagues.

Off the top of my head, I would say the biggest opposition to this list will come from those who follow the Matt Kenseths of the world. The cheerleaders will be a close second, followed by the golfers.

Auto racing is extremely dangerous. It requires tremendous eye-hand coordination. It demands quick reflexes and a sense of stamina. But a parent faces all that and more driving the Beltline at rush hour with three toddlers yelping from the backseat.

If cheerleading is a sport, then so is ballet.

Golf? Grab a beer, fire up a cigar and we'll discuss it over 18.

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