'A vision of paradise lost': coaching as a grasshopper rather than an ant

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Abstract:

The work of Bernard Suits continues to be discussed in the sports philosophy field, over forty years after the publication of his brilliant book, The Grasshopper, Games, Life and Utopia. Much of this discussion has looked at how the perfectionist consequences of Suits' definition of game playing impacts on gamewrighting. However, it is not just the cheat, the trifler, the spoilsport, or even the subperfectionist that the gamewrighter must be concerned with. This paper uses the spirit of the Grasshopper to suggest that what we should also be concerned about in contemporary sport at almost all levels, and what gamewrighting discussions should focus on, is the loss of player autonomy because of the control exerted by coaches, managers and analysts.

KEYWORDS: Suits, gamewrighting, perfectionism, autonomy, coaching, analytics

Introduction:

Like many philosophers of sport, I was introduced to Suitsean game philosophy through his chapter called 'The Elements of Sport' in the Morgan and Meier edited collection (1988). For a young undergraduate, the chapter was indeed 'impressive' (MacRae 2020, 49); it appeared to successfully collect all games/sports together under a set of simple characteristics/family resemblances that captured their distinctive and important shared features. My early Suitsean education coincided with taking up coaching in junior basketball. I spent much of my early years as a coach concerned with the efficient production of basketball perfection, understood in the narrow or reductive way of winning the game by achieving the game generated scarcity of putting the ball in the basket more often than the opponent. In so doing, my players were trained to store up their fouls, protect their scarce access to the ball by playing safely and not shooting under pressure or turning the ball over, and restrict their opponent's opportunity to access the limited resources available in this condition of scarcity. In other words, I mimicked the perfect college or professional coach, an ant-master who achieved success regularly by controlling and limiting the movements, strategies, opportunities and access of my players and our opponents. For example, I would often use my timeouts to break the opponent's momentum. Only later on when I read the whole of Suits' Grasshopper book, did its initial chapter, the 'Death of a Grasshopper' take

on a special significance for me that has never departed. Fortunately, with some deep reflection, I realized that I had forgotten that in playing sport, we should be in a utopic-like state that recognizes the activity's splendid futility. And so my coaching changed to intrude much less on the creative lusory autonomy of players, both my players and those from the opposition.

My sense is that a narrow notion of ant-like perfection is present in current debates between realists and non-realists in sport philosophy. I will quickly revisit this debate, but with a specific focus on what realists and non-realists seem to agree on; that is, the compelling moral force of perfectionism or sporting excellence(s) on gamewrighting (Morgan 2018, Russell 2018).[2] John Russell's 'internal principle' states that 'a fundamental purpose of sport is that it should be undertaken in such a manner that the excellences embodied in achieving the lusory goal are not undermined but are maintained and fostered' (2018, 455; also 2014, 319) by both game players and gamewrights, so as to present sport as 'the best it could be' or 'in its best light' (Russell 2018, 455). Agreement with this version of perfectionism then has downstream consequences when discussing actual gamewrighting, and the production of rules governing doping (Devine 2019; Dixon 2018; Loland 2018), violence (Dixon 2010), age, weight or sex segregation/verification (Devine 2019; Pike 2021), trash talking (Dixon 2007) and of course, what should be done with any form of intentional rule violation (Vosson 2014; Moore 2017; Dixon 2018; Imbrisevic 2019). In the first section of this paper, I will suggest that the notion of perfectionism that is agreed upon in such gamewrighting decisions, is the reductive ant-like one that I initially pursued as a junior coach, where perfectionism is narrowly understood in terms of game scarcity.

The Narrative of Perfection and Winning in Sports Philosophy

According to Suits, sports are valuable because they allow athletes to 'realise in themselves capacities not realizable in the pursuit of ordinary activities' (1988, 43). The term 'capacity' is the crucial one in this definition as a capacity is generally understood as something that can be made more efficient with work- it implies a perfectionist moral framework (Yorke 2018, 178). In simple terms, the constitutive rules of any sport establish the perfectionist credentials of that sport (Vossen 2014, 335). Nicholas Dixon makes the point that, 'one of

competitive sport's least controversial goals [is] to determine which team has [the] most athletic skill' (1999, 14; also 2018, 363, 367). It is common in sports philosophy to suggest that the rules of sports have been developed in ways that allow athletes to display the excellences that sports have been designed to promote (Dixon 2018, 363). These definitions have not yet been tied to the results of the sport, beyond that which is captured in its simplest prelusory sense by the constitutive rules.

Many writers then bind this notion of excellence to the achievement of results in a sport/game. As examples from a very large pool in sport philosophy, Steffen Borge (2019, 432) argues that: 'Utopian sports will share the same internal purpose of winning sport competitions', Nicholas Dixon (1999, 10) suggests that the 'central purpose of competitive sport is precisely to provide a comparison… that determines which team or player is superior', and Sigmund Loland states that 'sporting competitions are characterized by the structural goal of measuring, comparing, and ranking competitors according to relevant abilities and skills' (2018, 349). All positions link the idea of winning to their account of sporting perfection.

This reductive notion of perfectionism, extended to the use of gamewrighting to create fair conditions for all competitors so that relevant performance excellences will be the determining factor in deciding who wins, is then presented as a normative justification for rules regarding doping, sex segregation, trans* participation, trash talking and violence mitigation, largely regardless of the sporting context. Frequently used as an argument against doping in sport, the perfectionist strand is suggested as the justification for the current ban, across all sports at all levels and with all participants.[3] I will use a very creative version of this argument, presented by John Devine (2013) to exemplify. Devine's position begins with the perfectionist understanding of Suitsean sport; that is, that sports rules function to exclude more efficient methods of achieving a goal with the purpose that excellence using less efficient methods can be demonstrated by the very best athletes in winning performances. In other words, sports rules allow for the 'display of *relevant* excellences' (2013, 42, my emphasis). Antidoping rules are justified on two grounds. The first is when the use of a doping agent interferes with the display of a relevant excellence in a sport. The example that Devine uses to demonstrate is the use of beta blockers in archery, or any other aiming sport, where overcoming natural tremors when under competition

pressure is an excellence that the comparative challenge in such sports allow/ensure the display of. The second occurs when the use of doping agents interferes with the mix of different sporting excellences that the rules of a sport allow athletes to display. Here, Devine explains that the permission to use steroids in tennis or rugby would make those games more one-dimensional, the players less different from each other in size and shape, and prevent the display of other forms of excellences including tactical nous and agility. In his words, 'doping tends to elevate only a narrow range of physical excellences' (2013, 43), and the permission to use strength-building drugs would further reduce this range of physical excellences (also see Loland 2018). Further, one of the great strengths of Devine's argument is that he recognizes that different sports will require different lists of doping agents, with each list specifically reflecting both the range and balance of excellences on display in their sport. Yet even in this most informed explication, such justifications for the antidoping rules suggest that, with doping, we allow result-based excellence to be achieved via the influence of something that sport gamewrighting should treat as foreign, the doping agent. For the purposes of this paper, I do not need to critique or celebrate Devine's argument. It is enough for my thesis that so many authors in sport philosophy, and practitioners in sport policy making, have used this form of argument to suggest that the importance of gamewrighting lies in the development of rules that support result-based understandings of perfection and excellence.

Problems with the Emphasis on Perfection

C.T. Nguyen (2017; also see Kretchmar 2019b) offers a brilliant critique of this 'comparison of individual excellences' on the basis of its support for narratives linked to an individualist orientation in sport. The comparative challenge is not part of the Suitsean definition of sport beyond its simple relationship to the necessity of prelusory goals for players to pursue; it is something that has crept into sport philosophy by stealth (Nguyen 2017). Nguyen states, 'the philosophy of sport has taken professional and Olympic sports as its paradigmatic cases… But sports for the rest of us-- sports in friendly life, in family life-- are often quite different' (2017, 134) in motivating orientations.[4] The effect of this creeping assumption has been that proposed game design changes are focused on the comparative challenge for

victorious excellence, rather than by the many other motivations, including social motivations such as 'the pursuit of [collective] pleasure' (Nguyen 2017, 134).

In addition, in these gamewrighting efforts, we often find it difficult to agree on which abilities and skills should be considered relevant to achieving excellence in a specific sport. Lopez-Frias exemplifies one such conflict by explaining the pluralistic notion of excellence in soccer across different cultural and educational contexts, contrasting the creative poetic soccer excellence of possession-based play with the controlled pragmatic soccer excellence of territory-based play (2018, 171; also see Sookermany 2016, 338). How should gamewrights who produce rules and regulations in sport come to an agreement on the specific excellences that need to be protected by their skillful gamewrighting?[5]

Finally, very few participants in sport are capable of achieving result-based sporting perfection. If this quest for perfection is then presented as essential to the nature of sport, then only the most elite, and normally male athletes in most sports, can successfully pursue this nature of sport. The gender politics of this point was explained by Scott Watson (1993) when he described the phallocentric and discriminatory nature of reductive definitions of sporting excellence (also see Burke 2014; Kretchmar 2019b; Nguyen 2017). But more broadly than this, the scarcity-inspired version of excellence in sport seems to also exclude the vast majority of men as well. The genetic lottery imposes a force of exclusion from quests for perfection on most of us who play sport. The rest of us are participants who are pursuing something that is sub-perfectionist. And for some of us, the shared joy of the air-swing in golf or the air-ball in basketball would remain a motivating pleasure to play sport in Suits' utopia.

Excellence and Plenitude in Sport

It seems difficult to mesh this view of perfectionism with the attitude of the main character in Suits' book, the grasshopper. For if the grasshopper is 'the exemplification… of the life most worth living' (Suits 1990, ix) in the game of being a grasshopper, then the result that is produced, his death in winter, is far short of performance excellence.[6] The important message of the grasshopper is that rather than understand perfection in terms of scarcity, we should understand it in terms of the plenitude of opportunities that sporting games offer

players if rules have been wisely written. Or, in Suitsean terms, games are an invention that can produce game-generated scarcity 'without [causing] a plenitude deficit' (Suits 19a, 140). Following the Grasshopper's rejection of food provided by others, he makes two pertinent points. The first is that if living in a state of plenitude, 'the Grasshopper would not get his come-uppance nor the ant his *shabby* victory. The life of the Grasshopper would be vindicated and that of the ant absurd' (Suits 1990, 8, my emphasis). Why is the ant's victory shabby? Suits, via the Grasshopper goes on to explain:

> …it is the *logic* of my position which is at issue. And this logic shows that prudential actions (e.g., those actions we ordinarily call work) are self-defeating in principle. For prudence may be defined as the disposition 1/ to sacrifice something good (e.g., leisure) if and only if such sacrifice is necessary for obtaining something better (e.g., survival) and 2/ to reduce the number of good things requiring sacrifice – ideally, at least – to zero. (1990, 8)

Part of the logic of the Grasshopper's position resides in the idea that, win, lose or draw in one contest, we will start the next contest with a new opportunity to express our autonomy. This is a plenitude that rarely exists in a work-life of instrumentality.

I have a confession to make. Bernard Suits would describe me as 'a trifler' at golf. For the past two decades, I have played golf with a group of friends on a weekly basis during the spring and summer periods. In approximately 400 rounds of golf, we have never scored. We are aware of the scoring method in golf and have a particularly close relationship with the short par-3 sixth hole, where three of our group have recorded holes-in-one, but we simply choose not to be concerned with scoring. From an outsider's view, we appear to still be playing golf. We maintain the importance of the prelusory goal of putting the ball in the hole, using the 'contrived problem' (Suits 2019, 219) of propelling the ball long distances with golf clubs, and having the attitude that acceptance of these inefficient means make the game of golf possible. But Suits would explain that our golf exemplifies the difference between playing golf [or doing something golf-like] and playing the game of golf. Our golf-like (Suits, 1988, 46) meeting is one where the game of golf is now excessively lax, because we have ignored the 'game-generated scarcity' (Suits 2019, 223), produced in competitive scoring with self and others (Suits 1990, 23). Yet in the embrace of the plenitude that exists in our weekly games of golf, we attempt shots that a golfer, certainly of our skill level, would

not attempt if concerned with this game-generated scarcity. And sometimes, we achieve the perfection of a Tiger Woods [not quite]. In playing this way, Suits would label my golfing friends and I as triflers, satisfying our 'own privately crafted goals' (Morgan 1994 cited by Loland 2018, 351; see also Kretchmar 2019a, 279). But I would prefer if we were recognized as grasshoppers who 'store up games for summer [and spring]' (Suits 2019, 230, my insertion) to demonstrate our autonomously chosen version of golf 'imperfection', inspired by the idea that there will be another game of golf next week, unless it is raining.

Our participation in golf can be better understood because our pursuit of golf does not include the 'frenzy, stress, pain, and tedium' that the 'busy-ness' (Suits 1984, 8) of contemporary sport induces. A 'laid-back' (Suits 1984, 6) grasshopperian attitude is one that is rarely seen in almost all levels of sport today. Kretchmar (2019b) celebrates the 'modestly competent', as capturing Suitsean sport. However, Kretchmar's modestly competent athletes retain their attachment to the game-generated scarcity of their own sports; they are golfers who try to reduce their individual handicap or break their age in scoring. I would also like to celebrate the unskilled, the novice, the uncoordinated, and the height, weight and age-challenged; that is, the subperfectionists or the 'seriously incompetent', who can still find lusory joy in the error, the mistake, the duffed shot, the fumbled snap, the broken play, the missed instruction, the brain fade, the wipeout and the technical mishap. Such imperfections may be some of the major sources of inspired play in the controlled spheres of most public sport today. As Sookermany suggests (2016, 326): 'when we witness profound innovative changes within the sporting world… it is… because individuals have "broken" or at least pushed the boundaries of the prevailing standards and know-how'.

In the final section of this paper, I will suggest that it is up to the gamewrights to make rules which ensure that this un-controlled, boundary-pushing, imperfect play remains part of contemporary sport. Additionally, the target of this gamewrighting should then be the sport coaches, sport analyzers and sports managers that are interfering with the achievement of the utopia that the grasshopper saw as possible from the game-playing plenitude that we share. We have sacrificed the good of autonomous opportunities for imperfections for something that is controlled and limited by others; our victories are now shabby. If we can just stop worrying about efficient ways of winning, we can start thinking about performance in novel, more creative and plural ways (Elcombe and Hardmun 2020).

We can all become the grasshoppers that are unconcerned with their future winters. At the very least, we can become the 'rogue ants' (Suits 2019, 193) who think about the present possibilities in utopian summers rather than gathering food for the next winter.

Changing the Focus of Gamewrighting

Rules about doping, along with rules that limit the participatory pool as occurs with gender, weight and age segregation, gender verification and trans* rules, are all examples of auxiliary (Meier 1985) and/or pre-event rules (Suits 19b). They do not touch on prelusory goals, lusory means, constitutive rules or lusory attitudes, or allow us to understand sporting excellence as somehow separate from the play of the athlete (Francis 2019, 138); that is, for seven tours, Lance Armstrong seemed to be displaying performance perfection, whether doped or not. My major thesis is not that the Suitsean narrative of scarcity-based perfection has been applied too narrowly to conditions, regulations and rules that exist prior to play—I think is has, but such discussions are evident elsewhere in sports philosophy (see for example, Morgan 2009).

My major thesis is that the Suitsean story of plenitude-based imperfection has not been applied anywhere near broadly enough to aspects of in-event gamewrighting in sport. The grasshopperian attitude is one that should inform all aspects of gamewrighting in sport, and I will apply this attitude to produce a critique of the overemphasis of coaching control in contemporary sports, that is seeping into almost all contexts of sport. Leslie Howe's (2017, 50) example of the ludonarrative dissonance between a 'creative, free-roaming, playmaker' and a coaching staff oriented by 'ruthless efficiency' is evocative for my argument. How can the coaching staff orientation be limited, so that the playmaker can autonomously express his or her creativity? Following from Faulkner (2019, 355), I hope to produce support for a vision of competitive games/sport that 'aims to change how we think about games', and especially how we think about in-event gamewrighting that could limit the influence of coaches and analysts on players playing games.

One of the most compelling philosophical positions on this type of in-event gamewrighting is Kretchmar's understanding of A, T and E games, where he states his purpose as:

> My intent… was to draw attention to the structural options faced by all gamewrights and players. No structure, I claimed, is fullproof [*sic*]. No games come without flaws. Very few, if any, gamewrighting decisions are made without normative tradeoffs… We must put up with the flaws (or try to control them as best we can) in order to reap the attendant benefits. (2015, 49)

For me, one flaw looms large in the recent in-event practice of sports of all varieties, but especially team sports; control of athlete play is increasingly restricted by coaches and analysts, a phenomenon that Devine calls 'coaching creep' (2021, 45). My problem with Devine's argument is that it appears to replace 'coaching creep' with 'captain's creep'. When it comes to gamewrighting, I would suggest that the areas that a Suitsean grasshopper would be concerned about are those that take autonomous control of the performance out of the hands of game players (Lopez Frias 2020), whether that control then lies in the hands of a coach or a captain. As Suits explains, 'why submit to lusory servitude when we are in a position to achieve lusory autonomy' (19a, 142).

Eventually, after the Grasshoppers second return to life, he and Skepticus, one of his ant-followers, come to an agreement about the importance of game-playing in utopic life. Skepticus explains: 'All of life is like a football game, and we are in danger of destroying it by our misguided – indeed tragic – efforts to improve it' (Suits 1984, 22). Sookermany explains this as fitting with 'the dominant epistemology of the enlightenment era' where progress is believed to occur with 'hierarchical bureaucracies, standardization, economic efficiency, and the mass market' (2016, 325). Such controlling forces are not as evident in the naturally flowing games of rugby and soccer/Association football, where mid-period timeouts are not allowed and the games are not so apparently broken down into discreet episodes of plays. But even in these games, there is a regularity of tactics, substitutions, dead ball set plays and defensive orientations that are exposed by the recalcitrant: Think of the play of the Japanese Rugby Union team, or the soccer teams from African nations, at their respective World Cups. I understand that the suggestion that the highly choreographed pass-and-run play of the Japanese rugby team, produced through a distinct rugby union tradition in that country, is 'wayward' appears easy to challenge, but it is discernibly different to the territory-based kicking game that other teams offer up at the World Cup. Even here, the recent impact of the migration of coaches from Europe, Australia and New Zealand in rugby,

and from Europe and North/South America in soccer, is probably limiting these differences in wayward game play.

In contrast to rugby and soccer, in the mostly North American games of basketball, baseball, and gridiron, we see levels of coaching and analytics that support ant-like regularity over grasshopperian creativity. I agree with Nicholas Dixon (2018) that a focus on the internal goods of sport will prevent coaches and administrators from undermining the pursuit of these goods in their actions and adjudications. However, whereas Dixon is concerned with how external goods such as prizemoney, sponsorship and status can create situations where coaches may encourage players to break rules, or administrators may enact rules that inhibit excellences, I am more broadly concerned with how coaching, administrating and sport science/analytics can inhibit athletic expression and creativity whilst athletes are still acting in conventional ways within existing rules and practices. I would also argue that 'hard-core aficionados' (Dixon 2018, 370) are unlikely to criticize these coaching and administrative types of intrusions, such is the strength of the hegemony that supports coach and administrative control over players. The limitation of coach control might be one of those 'harder normative cases' where we need to debate 'what attitudes and mix of skills and values befit true athletic excellence' (Morgan 2018, 486) but also what relationships to secondary agents, such as coaches and administrators, allow for this.

During a normal NBA basketball game of 48 minutes of actual playing time, we witness seven team timeouts for each team, supposedly of 75 seconds each, but normally running closer to 3 minutes each. So total team timeouts take up between 17.5--42 minutes. Add in interval breaks [another 25 minutes], and the coaches have overt and direct control of players for around 60 minutes during a single game. Given the propensity of coaches to use timeouts to break the opposition team's momentum, then any suggestion that this coaching helps to display or support performance excellence, either individual or mutually achieved, is mistaken. Whether reflecting on the psychological understanding of flow (Czicksmihaly 1990; Dixon 2018) or the philosophical concept of mutuality in competitive excellence (Simon 2014) or non-Utopian acts of game-spoiling (Vossen 2008, 2014), such distracting game breaks are counterproductive to any understanding of performance excellence. This controlling influence on player autonomy exists before we consider the influence of various other factors such as the numbers of coaches on the team staff, the

rigidity of tactics, the dominance of the point guard/forward in controlling the offense in the international, professional and college game and the rise of game analytics that also weigh heavily on a grasshopperian experience of sporting plenitude. In the developmental setting of high school and college basketball, the repressive attitude is augmented by age and power differences between coach and athlete. We could make an analogy between coach-controlled basketball play and the Grasshopper's view of non-game like sex. The grasshopper explains:

> Sex, as we have come to know and love it, is part and parcel with repression, guilt, naughtiness, domination, submission, liberation, rebellion, sadism, masochism, romance, and love. But none of these things has a place in Utopia… People like Norman Brown in his book *Life Against Death* take the view that sex is something that has been distorted and corrupted by the repressions and restraints of civilization. (Suits 1990, 10)

But if basketball suffers from this phenomenon of excessive control by coaches and analysts, then both baseball and gridiron/American football, are drowning in it. Baseball includes coaches on the field at first and third base. Analytics are signaled to fielding and batting teams on a play-by-play basis. The rhythm of the game is interrupted by the regularity of coaches' or catchers' visits to the mound. The nature of the game, the heavily mediatized and analyzed league, and the developmental system of farm teams all help to drive out wayward innovation. Morgan's (1991, 6-7) explanation of Christoper Lasch's culture of narcissism in US sports explains that: 'qualities such as prudence, calculation and caution… find a niche for themselves in sport… Strategies of minimizing risk and uncertainty… come to play a prominent role in our sports'.

Gridiron combines the worst of both sports. This time we have a coach in the booth above the ground calling out analytically-based suggestions of play-by-play tactics to coaching staff on a heavily coach-populated sideline, who then transfer these suggestions to the on-ground ant-masters of quarterback or defensive captain, by either microphone (Devine 2021) or signal. Plays on both sides of the line are so rigorously practiced and choreographed, so that individual creativity lies in the hands of very few players and is sometimes the result of a play breakdown. The effects are explained beautifully by Sookermany (2016, 335-336, my emphasis); 'there is an institutionalization of striving towards the top… gained through efficiency of optimization… and establishing predictability

through standardization elevates saneness as the standard which in turn is manufactured, managed, and *manifested by systems of control to eliminate uncertainty*'.

The contrast with some other sports remains obvious. Rugby, soccer, and the local football games of Australia and Ireland, have both ignored calls for mid-period timeouts, although the presence of support staff on the grounds providing messages from the coaching staff seems to be increasing (Devine 2021). But the contrast with other nations, playing the same sports is also obvious. Japanese coaching, at the college and high school level, in many sports that have not been touched by US style coaching and analytics, is advisory rather than controlling. This is tied back to the different purpose of educational-based sports programs in Japan. The Japanese system is oriented towards using sport [including scholarships and residences] to produce civic education for athletes (McDonald 2005). The barrier to athlete autonomy here is the underpinning philosophy of the civic education that is pursued in Japan- the old Japanese adage that 'the nail that stands out will be hammered back in' is still forceful in Japanese college sport even in the absence of a coach figure (McDonald 2005, 218). The coaching pedagogy in Japan becomes athlete-centred. The absence of the coach promotes the opportunity for greater athlete autonomous action that, whilst heavily limited by the Japanese context of civic-mindedness, should not be dismissed out of hand for sport-education models in other countries. As a model for autonomy promotion, the Japanese system of college athletics might approach the ideal of sport education and the student-athlete that is now almost absent in the NCAA model (McDonald and Burke 2019).

The grasshopper presents his utopia as one where 'Labor itself generates labor-saving improvements and thus… it carries the seeds of its own destruction' (Suits 1990, 208). On this view, coaching should generate the seeds of its own destruction such that players are capable of finding autonomous opportunities for creativity, perfection or winning within their play, as they become more experienced. A mixture of the Japanese orientation to coaching, with the individual freedom that is expressed as a necessity in other societies, should allow for this creativity. But in contrast to the grasshopper's utopian vision, Skepticus states:

> while your vision is one of hope, mine is one of despair. For in my vision Utopia is gained and lost many times. Whenever ant industry abolishes the need for

> that industry and ants find themselves possessed of the dreadful freedom of grasshoppers, there any *obsessiveness reasserts itself*, and so Utopia is found only to be thrown away again and again. (Suits 1990, 208, my emphasis)

Rather than coaching producing the seeds of its own destruction, it seems that coaching produces more coaching. Contemporary public and mediatized sport, with its emphasis on coach control and analysis, is a lost utopian possibility. The further danger is that those coaches who are deemed successful because of their control of their players-- Mike Krzyzewki at Duke, Muffet McGraw at Notre Dame, Joe Madden at the Angels and Tony La Russa at the White Sox, become the coaching models for junior and developmental programs. When I started coaching junior basketball thirty years ago, it was just me and the players on the bench. Now I have two assistant coaches, a team manager and a statistician.

In Suits' terms, such high-profile coaches are successful at winning because they have 'forgotten…because having suppressed- one's own lusory attitude' (2019, 220). The trouble is that they have also suppressed their players' lusory autonomy at the same time. Lopez Frias (2019) ties Suits' utopia back to the importance of positive and negative freedom. He states (2019, 413): 'While engaged in game playing, individuals must employ instrumental actions to achieve the goal of the game'. However, this is difficult when the coach decides to either sit you on the bench for the whole game, or limit your opportunity to play freely. Many players can never experience autonomy because they are never '*independent* from [the] external controlling influences' (2019, 408, my insertion) of coaching and analysis. They are, paraphrasing Kretchmar (2019a, 280) living a sporting existence which is a 'boredom-dominated dystopia'.

Conclusion

The plenitude-based grasshopperian attitude necessitates a shift away from coach-controlled play, and our gamewrighting should contemplate this. In this respect, a broader orientation to perfection or excellence would be guided by looking at what intrudes on players during a game. Game conditions which interfere with athlete autonomy include things such as the number and length of timeouts and mound visits. Successful

gamewrighting will locate these excesses as the source of some despair and frustration with contemporary sports. Alternatively, using Loland's (2018) terms, we could consider rule changes that place more artful constraints on coach control that 'stimulate playfulness, creativity and meaning'. Such changes are more difficult to come up with but may involve limitations on the number of coaches,[7] limiting coaching access to statistics, analytics and replays during the game, the duration and number of training sessions allowed in developmental programs such as the NCAA and High School competitions, and the limiting of certain tactical strategies in these developmental programs. I agree that all these changes would be difficult to police when dealing with win-oriented coaches (Devine 2021).

This would mean a shift towards an emancipatory 'celebration/toleration' of the error, the mistake, the broken play, the imperfect and the human, as that part of sports that lie beyond the controlled. When the long snapper in gridiron misses his target, we witness much that can't be choreographed. It is in these imperfect and uncontrolled moments of games that we see human sporting creativity that is play-inspired. And to those who think this an impossibility, that the genie of coaching and analysis cannot be put back in the bottle, I will finish with the Grasshopper's suggestion that: 'new and unfamiliar games usually do appear fanciful' (Suits 1990, 214).

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[1] I am enormously grateful to both Cheryl Ballantyne, Bernard Suits’ widow, who permitted me access to Bernard Suits’ collected work that is stored as fonds in the University of

Waterloo Library, and to the kind librarian, Martha Lauzon, who copied and sent the files that I had requested. This does not give this work any special legitimacy, as the work is an extension of *my reading* of Suits. I am solely responsible for any misreadings of the work of Bernard Suits.
I am also grateful to the two reviewers, and the editor Paul Gaffney, for their constructively critical, but still very kind, comments. In truth, this paper was messy before these comments helped me to work out its narrative themes.
[2] John Gleaves (2017) has produced a strong and cogent criticism of the essentialism of the 'comparative test premise' that underpins both realist and antirealist depictions of perfectionism in sport.
[3] William Morgan's (2018, 2009) treatment/enhancement distinction is one example of a counterpoint to the universality of anti-doping laws, as is the John Devine example that I use in this paper.
[4] It would be interesting to survey how many leading sports philosophers were also excellent, or excessively competitive, at their chosen sporting pastimes.
[5] Jon Pike gives a good working example of the steps taken by World Rugby in dealing with regulations concerning transwomen players in women's rugby, as the process included 'key stakeholders and experts' arguing the case from their different interested positions (2021, 156). For the purpose of this paper, how broadly we draw lines around discursive communities is important. Will the inexpert be included within the process that informs gamewrighting discussions?
[6] Much of the first chapter of Suits' book addresses this issue of grasshopperian perfection, so this claim is not a critique of Suits' position. Grasshopper is, of course, excellent at being idle-- and this ultimately leads to his death when confronting a winter of scarcity.
[7] As suggested to me by Paul Gaffney, tennis is toying with the idea of allowing some coaching during matches. This would be a regressive step in my view. Golf continues to be played without coaches in most situations, although maybe the caddy is taking on more of a de-facto coaching role. Netball is an interesting team sport where sideline coaching is actively prevented by umpires, at least in junior competitions. However, even netball leagues at elite levels have now introduced the mid-period time-out.