Revisiting the Concept of Sport

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ABSTRACT

Ever since Suits and Meier discussed the relationships among play, games, and sports – the so-called 'Tricky Triad' – hardly anyone has touched on this foundational issue in the philosophic literature on sports.　It could be thought that sports philosophers have reached a clear, or at least a commonly agreeable, conception of these terms.　However, many readers, perhaps having different conceptions of how to identify certain activities as sports, are still unclear on the issue.　In spite of the recent trend in research on particular moral issues in sports, there are still certain points worth explaining and challenging in previous debates and discussions.

The main purpose of this study is to explore and clarify those different conceptions.　By doing so, it is hoped that this study will help general readers to understand this complex issue with regard to fundamental knowledge on the conceptual analysis of sports.　It is also hoped that this study will help sports researchers to select a suitable account when investigating their so-called 'sports issues'.

Key Words: sport, concept, philosophy

再訪運動的概念

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摘　要

自從 Suits 與 Meier 熱烈討論過玩（play），遊戲（games）及運動（sport）這三者的關係後－也就是所謂的 'Tricky Triad'（神秘的三角關係）－之後便很少有研究學者在運動哲學文獻中談到此一最基本的課題。有人可能認為許多運動哲學家已釐清運動這個概念或至少達到了一種共識。然而，我們當中仍有許多人不太了解此一課題，或是對運動這個概念存有著不同的看法。儘管近來運動哲學界之研究有偏向運動道德上的課題，對於運動這個概念仍然有一些值得解讀及挑戰的課題。

本文主要在於探究及釐清這些不同的概念。藉由當代哲學當中的概念分析法，研究者希望本文可以幫助一般讀者來了解有關運動這個複雜的概念。同時也希望此一論文有助於運動研究學者在做研究的同時能夠清楚界定自己所要探討的 '運動課題'。

關鍵詞：運動，概念，哲學

I. INTRODUCTION

In the philosophical literature on sport, although so much work has been done as to how to identify or demarcate sports from non-sports, it appears that there are various conceptions of sport. The main task of this paper is to explore and clarify those different conceptions[1]. By doing so, it is hoped that this paper will help general readers to understand this complex issue with regard to fundamental knowledge on the conceptual analysis of sport. It is also hoped that this will help sports researchers to select a suitable account when investigating their so-called 'sports issues'.

Thus, in this paper, I will first explore and clarify two major views that I name 'narrow' and 'broad' with respect to the concept of sport. Then I will argue that sport is an ongoing evolving concept. Owing to the existence of different conceptions of sport, it is crucial that sports researchers should state a clear 'boundary' when they start to address their so-called 'sports-issues'. This paper is divided into the following sections:

- The Narrow Concept of Sport
- The Open Concept of Sport
- Towards a Better Understanding of Sport

II. THE NARROW (CLOSED) CONCEPT OF SPORT

The narrow view on the concept of sport generally refers to those arguments which state that sport can be defined or demarcated from other non-sport activities. According to Gardiner (1996), there is a considerable body of sociological and cultural literature concerning the definition of sport (Blanchard, 1995; Coakley, 1994; Dunning, 1971; Loy, 1979; Snyder & Spriezer, 1983). Typically, many philosophers of sport like some sociologists think that sport can be defined or distinguished from other activities and they have tried to do so on the basis of some or all of the following characteristics: 'physical skill', 'competition', 'games', 'rules', 'institutionalization', etc. Here I shall review three of the most important scholars' works. They are Meier, Suits and Kretchmar.

1. Meier's Conception of Sport

In his early work, Meier (1981) revealed some of the inadequacies of the sociological definitions of sport. Based on a detailed study of the substantial sport literature in sociology, he found that the problem of the definition of sport is one of the most basic and extensive, if highly contentious,

issues to be found in the field. Because there is a lack of accurate statement and consensus on this issue, Meier (1981, p. 79) attempted 'to overcome the limited views to produce an adequate definition of sport, to locate its precise boundaries, and to ferret out its essential core'. Meier's research consists of five major components[2] and his concluding points can be summarized as follows:

A. All sports are games.

B. The demonstration of physical skill or prowess is a necessary component of all sports.

C. High level of athletic skill or excellence is not necessary for participants to engage in sport.

D. Any postulated distinction between gross and fine motor activities, as a criterion for distinguishing sports from games, is rejected as arbitrary, unnecessary, and counterproductive.

E. Institutionalization is not a necessary component of the essence of sport. (Meier, 1981, p. 79).

Regarding these five points, some defects may be revealed in Meier's conception of sport. In particular, point one and point two are more problematic, which I shall reveal their difficulties later. Point three and point four are dependent on the truth of point two. That is, if it can be proved that the demonstration of physical skill or prowess is not a necessary component of all sports, then there is no need to address these two issues. As for point five, while I agree that institutionalization should not be seen as a necessary component of the essence of *all* sports, certain sports are indeed institutionally constructed (e.g. basketball).

To start with, I shall return to point one – all sports are games. Meier (1981, 1989) asserts that all sports possess the four essential characteristics of a game (from Suits' definition[3]), as well as the fifth characteristic requiring the demonstration of physical skill or prowess. Any activity fulfilling these five requirements thus is termed a sport, however, in this regard, two points may be addressed.

First, Meier does not fully explain *why* all sports have to be games. If his assertion is based on empirical grounds (i.e. observation), then one can still use the same approach to find

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[1] The rationale behind this task is in accordance with John Rawls' (1971) distinction between *concept* and *conceptions* regarding justice, as he suggests that 'it seems natural to think of the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice…' (p. 5).

[2] They are: (1) a preliminary assessment of the requirements and difficulties of the task; (2) a systematic delineation of the individual factors and characteristics deemed to be essential components of the concept of sport in a rigorous scrutiny of more than fifty research studies which concern themselves, at least in part, with this task; (3) an extended, critical analysis of three major characteristics – the necessity and nature of physical skill or prowess, institutionalization, and the "play-game-sport" continuum; (4) the presentation of work towards an acceptable definition of sport; and (5) a differentiation of the concept of sport from the concepts of play and game.

[3] Meier (1988, p. 26) classifies Suits' definition of games as the following four characteristics: (1) goal directed activity; (2) rules limit the permissible means of goal attainment; (3) rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means; (4) rules are accepted to make the activity possible.

some other activities which people call sports without containing the elements of games, such as track and field, or other non-competitive recreational sporting activities (mountain climbing, biking, jogging, fishing, swimming, weight-lifting, etc).

Second, while Meier wholeheartedly adopts Suits' definition of games, he does not provide reasons why Suits' model is more acceptable, precise and eminently productive. In fact, McBride (1979b) has pointed out that Suits' definition of game playing is incomplete. McBride uses a game called 'Sun, Earth and Moon' as an example to test whether or not such an activity fits the definition of game playing[4]. What he finds is that Suits' definition is fine for a very large number of game-playing cases, but that it is not sufficient for all cases. He calls this the 'Test of Narrowness'. Based on this position, McBride takes the following three claims to be true:

A. Some games are sports. e.g. baseball.

B. Some games are not sports. e.g. bridge.

C. Some sports are not games. e.g. fishing.

With regard to Meier's second concluding point – that the demonstration of 'physical skill' (or physical prowess) is a *necessary* component of all sports. The likely problem of this claim is that Meier (1981) did not fully explain *why* all sports have to involve physical skill. The reason he considers 'physical skill' as a necessary component of sport is simply based on the 'most salient, significant and frequently observed feature' in the sociological literature of sport. But *why* do sports have to involve 'physical skill' simply because 'physical skill' is frequently observed, recognized or practiced? Evidently, Meier does not offer a clear answer.

In fact, ironically, we can also refute this notion by using his approach of denying 'institutionalization' as a necessary component of the essence of sport. That is, 'institutionalization' should not be a necessary component of sport just because it is often practiced or recognized. For example, professional sports are typical examples of 'institutionalized sports' because they (as Meier would suggest) involve 'norms and patterns', 'formal association and specific administrative bodies', 'a technological and organizational sphere' and 'historical aspects'. However, the existence of these elements should not preclude the existence of non-institutionalized sports. Thus, this rationale can also be applied to his notion of 'physical skill'. That is, although 'physical skill' may often be seen in many sporting activities, it

does not explain why 'physical skill' has to be a necessary criterion of all sports.

2. Suits' Conception of Sport

Similarly, Suits also perceives the demonstration of physical skill to be a necessary component of all sports. Suits (1988, p. 45) even suggests that we should not ask the question, 'Why do sports have to involve physical skills?' (since it is not a well formulated question), but ask 'What kind of skill do we find in the class of activities we call sport?' And the answer is 'physical skill'. Thus, in Suits' opinion, chess and bridge are not sports since they lack 'physical skill'.

It seems that Suits' view of sport is based on a traditional concept of sport. Suppose we agree that his second question is valid, one might still want to ask: What does Suits mean by 'we'? If 'we' means Suits' 'community' (in North America), one can reasonably understand why sports have to involve 'physical skill' and why chess cannot be seen as a sport, since no one, or at least only the minority of his community, calls or recognizes chess as a form of sport. However, this is not the case. For Suits's rationale (and other philosophers who hold a traditional view on sport), 'we' more or less implies a universal denotation, and he is therefore trying to argue that the notion that 'all sports have to involve physical skill' is universally valid. This notion might be suspected, because one can still find that same people (a different 'we') in different communities or countries classify chess as a form of sport. As Tamboer (1992, p. 32) suggests:

> ... chess is in many countries accepted as a full-blown form of sport. In the Netherlands, for instance, the union of chess players is a full and respected member of the National Sports Federation (NSF). Hence, it is simply a fact that the term sport, in practice, is not always restricted merely to the category 'games of physical skill.'

However, if this empirical view (i.e. by observing what people actually are doing) is accepted, then the concept of sport might be associated with a kind of cultural relativism or sociological point of view whereby people in different communities or countries have different conceptions of sport. The danger of proposing cultural relativism in this regard might not help us make any further progress, as one of the major tasks of doing philosophy is to ferret out a clear and central concept of X (in this case, sport) rather than to accept many conceptions of X.

3. Kretchmar's Conception of Sport

Elsewhere, there have been discussions on this subject. One is Tamboer's (1992) paper *Sport and Motor Actions* and

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[4] McBride (1979b, p. 60) recalls Norman Malcom, a friend of Wittgenstein: '... My wife was the sun and maintained a steady pace across the meadow; I was the earth and circled her at a trot. Wittgenstein took the most strenuous part of all, the moon, and ran around me while I circled my wife. Wittgenstein entered into this game with great enthusiasm and seriousness ...'.

the other is Kretchmar's (1992) reaction to Tamboer's paper. I shall first analyze Kretchmar's paper, since Tamboer's conception of sport belongs to the broad category.

Kretchmar (1992) criticizes Tamboer's notion that 'motor action' is superior to 'physical skill' as a criterion of demarcation between a sport (e.g. soccer) and other activities (e.g. chess). Kretchmar thinks that although the word 'motor' seems to be better than the word 'physical', it could still refer to a capacity that has been built, as it were, into the body-machine. This, it would seem, pushes us back towards a dualistic image of persons. In order to prevent dualistic problems, Kretchmar therefore develops another term called 'nonsedentary' (which includes the consideration of movement and non-movement[5]) for us to capture a better understanding of sport. However, two points need to be clarified in Kretchmar's argument.

Firstly, it should be noticed that Tamboer's theory on the relation between 'motor action' and sport is rather more *contingent* than *necessary*. In other words, it was not Tamboer's intention to say that 'motor action' is a better, and indeed necessary, criterion than 'physical skill' to demarcate sport from other non-sporting activities. The empirical and contingent fact that most variants of sport do involve the performance of motor actions, should not be confused with a logical necessity. In a subsequent paper, Tamboer (1994) also clarified that chess, in his opinion, can be a form of sport, even though it does not involve a kind of skillfulness with respect to the performance of certain motor actions or physical skill.

Secondly, although Kretchmar's notion of 'nonsedentary' seems better than 'motor action' and helps us to understand the nature of sporting activities, including the possibilities of nonmovement such as baseball's catching, waiting, standing and balancing, one might still raise a question: Why do sports have to be 'nonsedentary'? It would be a 'vicious circle' if one uses Suits' approach by asking: 'What kind of skill do we find in the class of activities we call sport?' And the answer is 'nonsedentary skills'. This is exactly the same problem that Suits and Meier would have encountered if asked. However, if we understand that the spirit of the recommendation on 'nonsedentary' from Kretchmar was one of finding a way to describe the behaviour, not the part of the person (the motor part, or the physical part), in order to avoid dualism and thus to have in varying degrees 'nonsedentary' actions, then the term is neutral with regard to mind or body issues.

In summary, if the intention of these authors (Suits, Meier, Kretchmar as well as other scholars who hold a similar view[6]) is to give a valid or true definition of sport in an empirical sense, that is, describing what people actually mean when they use the term, or in a metaphysical sense, that is, articulating the 'essence' of sport, one is right to say that there are no final justifications. However, if Suits, Meier, Kretchmar and others are understood as trying to suggest not the only valid and true but a reasonable interpretation of sport to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon and, perhaps, develop the philosophical and conceptual tools in order to work with sport analysis, the critique of the above reasons to accept the suggested definition fails. Now, I will consider the broad (open) concept of sport.

III. BROAD (OPEN) CONCEPT OF SPORT

The broad concept of sport refers to those arguments which hold that sport cannot be defined or demarcated from other non-sport activities. Typically, some philosophers label those arguments as 'anti-essentialist' arguments. Some might be confused that 'anti-essentialist' arguments are meant to be against 'rule formalism'. However, this needs to be clarified first, because the former is concerned with the question 'what is sport?', whereas the latter is more to do with 'what are right actions in sport?'. In other words, 'anti-essentialism' is in fact against the 'closed' concept of sport rather than 'rule formalism'. The major objection to the possibilities of defining sport comes from McBride (1979a) and Tamboer (1992). I shall address all of them and offer a critique at the end.

1. McBride's Conception of Sport

McBride (1979a, p. 48) thinks that the concept of sport is a vague, imprecise one, and thus, one that cannot be defined. Here are his four claims:

A. Neither the intension nor the extension of the concept sport is concise.

B. Attempts to limit concisely the intension of the concept of sport will either fail or end up as stipulative.

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[5] Kretchmar reveals that 'nonmovement' (such as standing, bracing, balancing, waiting in the baseball game) also constitutes the very important part of sport. However, people normally are more attracted by vigorous action, and we tend to give it credit beyond its due.

[6] Both Paddick (1975) and his follower Osterhoudt (1979, 1994, 1996) emphasize 'physicality' or 'physical character' as a necessary component (and an intrinsic good) of sport. However, their views seem to be only limited to those sports which contain physical character (or of the moving body) and constitutive rules. More specifically, their views are limited to certain sporting games (sporting contests). As Osterhoudt (1996, pp. 92-3) states the following which is similar to Suits' definition of games: "In sport, the movements are formed and valued intrinsically for one chooses less efficient movements than others available (in order to achieve the material ends of the activity) just because such a choice, and only such a choice, makes such otherwise useless movements themselves possible." In any sense, they still cannot answer why *all* sports have to involve 'physicality' and 'rules'.

C. The concept sport is ordinarily employed in a wide variety of ways, i.e. has a wide variety of usages, or meanings.

D. Philosophers of sport ought not waste their time attempting to define 'sport'.

McBride's conclusion is that the concept of sport is, along with being highly ambiguous, also extremely vague. Their view that sport cannot be defined is not simply because it is too arduous a task but because it is logically impossible to do so. In other words, a definition is achievable for a precise concept, but will not capture the particular characteristics of an imprecise concept.

2. Tamboer's Conception of Sport

In reaction to Suits' and Meier's problem about the notion of 'physical skill', it is not surprising to see why Tamboer (1992) calls their views on the concept of sport a *hidden essentialism.* Tamboer thinks that philosophers of sport (including Suits and Meier), generally, have not asked themselves, 'Why do sports have to involve physical skills?' They have simply taken it for granted. In order to provide a better account of the concept of human movement, Tamboer (1992, p. 39) developed another concept – 'motor action', which is a better exposition than the concept of 'physical skill'.

To explain briefly, the former account (the notion of motor action) is based on the image of the relational body, which is interpreted in terms of the inherent relationality of the body as 'knowing-the-world-in-action.' In this view, body and world cannot be defined independently of one another. Within this framework, it does not make sense to contrast bodily with non-bodily actions or activities. Climbing, swimming, and walking are, in this scheme of thinking, no more bodily than are thinking, perceiving, and speaking, in the sense that in all these cases a specific relationship with the world is realized.

By contrast, the latter account (the notion of physical skill) can easily encounter the problem of dualism (body-mind) – where body is understood as an isolated entity. This is the thesis of the current demarcation of sport from other domains (viz., in terms of its involvement of physical skills) to a (largely implicit) affirmation of the image of the substantial body. The traditional predominance of this interpretation of the human body explains the so-called hidden essentialism in the current characterization of sport.

By applying the concept of 'motor action' to sports, Tamboer then suggests that playing soccer should no longer be seen as a pure 'physical skill' activity. The primary concern of playing soccer is not with the manner of performing certain bodily movements, but with the skillful realization of motor actions (like kicking a ball). On the other hand, playing chess (which to Tamboer can also be justified as a form of sport) does not involve a kind of skillfulness with respect to the performance of certain motor actions. Tamboer's main thesis is that the relationship between 'motor action' and sport is empirical and contingent. Therefore, neither 'motor actions' nor 'physical skills' can be justified as a necessary condition or criterion of sport. As he argues that the use of the concept of sport is changing rapidly, he therefore wishes that philosophers of sport should not be handicapped either by a traditional sports model (exemplified by the Olympic sports) or by a hidden essentialism.

IV. CRITIQUE

Both McBride's and Tamboer's arguments show that there are great difficulties in defining sport with precision. Their arguments are quite plausible, however, two major problems on those non-essentialists' claims may arise.

1. The Problem of Uncritical Usage and Acceptance of Sport: Sport could be 'Anything'

If we accept all the possibilities of using sport within a variety of meanings such as metaphor, contest or non-contest, less or non-physical activities and so on, it is likely that sport could become an unlimited, expanding zone and therefore open to even greater confusion[7]. Consequently, sport could be 'anything' we refer to (see table 1).

According to Morgan (1979), the problem of the non-essentialists' analysis is that their uncritical acceptance of the conventional way in which 'sport' is used commits them from the outset to accept such a wide assortment of activities as legitimate sporting activities (thereby widening the 'extensional'

Table 1. Unlimited Expanding Zone of Sport

A. Sport	Linguistic metaphor. e.g. Give me a 'sporting' chance (fair, as in gaming).
B. Sport	a. from physical to non-physical activities. e.g. watching football.
	b. from challenge (test) to non-challenge (test) activities. e.g. sun-bathing.
C. Sport	Sports contest (competition). e.g. amateur sport and professional sport.
D. Sport	Less or no physical skill involved activities. e.g. driving, pool, darts, chess, etc.

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[7] For example, Kretchmar (1992, p. 53) states that he has difficulty in understanding Tamboer's position, and therefore would like to ask Tamboer to respond to the following three claims: (a) Because nobody can say what sport is, my claim can be neither accepted nor rejected; (b) Because sport is identifiable but volatile and fluid across time, my assertion may be true today, false tomorrow, and true again sometime in the future; (c) Because sport is identifiable but volatile and fluid across individuals and cultures, my assertion may be true for me and parts of my society but not for others.

limits of sport to an unmanageable degree), and that any attempt to precisely specify the 'intension' of this concept cannot succeed.

2. The Problems of Wittgenstein's 'Family Resemblances'

The second and most important problem is the 'problem of universals', which most non-essentialists take from Wittgenstein's (1974) notion of 'family resemblance'. They follow Wittgenstein's notion to 'look and see' and not merely to presume that there must be some essential elements shared by all activities that bear the name sport. They argue that what we in fact find when we scan these multifarious activities is an overlapping of characteristics that form a complex network of similarities. What we find, then, has no common essence but a 'family of resemblances' in which the degree of similarity is greatest when we consider adjacent members of the family, and furthest apart when we consider distant members of the family. However, I wish to suggest that Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance' entails difficulties for those who intend to apply his notion to clarify the concept of sport.

A. Wittgenstein's notion of games needs to be reconsidered

Wittgenstein (1974) thinks that the variety shows that there is no essence common to all games, but only a family resemblance which permits a chain of different uses. Wittgenstein never mentions 'sport' in his works. Instead, he takes only 'games' as an example to strengthen his thesis that 'games' have nothing in common except that they are 'games'.

If Wittgenstein (1974) does not mention 'sport' in his work, can we apply his thesis to a discussion of the concept of sport? Even if we agree to apply this analogy to sport, we still face another difficulty.

B. There are necessarily common features to all games - rules and playing

In Wittgenstein's (1974) passage above, there is no common feature among board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games. Although some of the games share similar features in between (field hockey and ice hockey), it is true that there is no common feature for all games in terms of their 'contents' unless they are the same game. However, as various games were formulated by those who invented or modified them, there are still 'common features' to all games if we look at them carefully.

Thus, while some games may share their directly exhibited resemblances, it can be suggested that all games share their 'forms' – existence of rules and participants' playing attitude. These elements concerning what constitutes a game are presupposed by the contents of all games. For example, board-games, card-games, ball-games all need 'rules' and

players to 'play'. Nevertheless, some games are not competitive, thus there is no possibility of winning and losing, but they all contain basic rules and they need participants' playing attitude to engage in a particular game. Aren't these common features to all games?

In this sense, two major difficulties in applying Wittgenstein's (1974) notion of 'family resemblances' to the concept of sport can be summarized as follows. One is that Wittgenstein's research interest is not related to sports but games or, put it more frankly, using games as an analogy for his philosophical investigation with respect to language. The second difficulty is that common features in games can be found in terms of their forms (i.e. rules and playing). If the two difficulties mentioned above cannot be resolved, then Wittgenstein's theory cannot be applied to our research in sports.

V. TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SPORT

From the previous reviews, although there is no logical necessity to argue that sports must have certain necessary criteria such as being games, physical, competitive, rules, institutionalized, etc, it does not mean there is no common ground for us to grasp a better understanding of sport. In this final section, I am going to point out three important perspectives that some (if not most) of the philosophers (including sociologists) of sport may not be aware of. Firstly, I wish to suggest that the necessary criteria of sport have to do with participants' *attitude* and their *skillful movement* [8]. Secondly, because these two criteria are not sufficient conditions, sport can be seen as an ongoing 'evolving' concept. Thirdly, because there are different conceptions of sport, I would like to argue that sports researchers must set a clear boundary each time they address so-called 'sports issues'.

1. The Essence of Sport: 'Playing, Doing or Practising'

I believe that the essence of sport has much to do with the *attitude* of participants and skillful movement. This can be derived from the rejection of Wittgenstein's (1974) notion of 'family resemblances'. As stated earlier, non-essentialists tend to stress Wittgenstein's notion that there is no 'common essence' in all sports although they all share similarities and form a family of resemblances. Here we can think of 'chairs' as an example. There are all kinds of chairs. They are of different colours, shapes, legs, size, etc, but we still call them chairs. Why? The proponents of Wittgenstein would probably say, 'all chairs have nothing in common except the

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[8] I am indebted to Professor Kretchmar for his insight concerning 'skillful movement' as a neutral terminology of the central concept of sport.

fact that they are called chairs'. However, can one not really find a common essence in all chairs?

Here are two possible answers to these questions – the common feature and the functional feature of chairs. The former has to do with similarities in 'origin', whereas the latter has to do with similarities in 'intention' and 'use'. It is such factors that, according to Mandelbaum (1965, p. 222), Wittgenstein (1974) overlooks in his specific discussion of family resemblances and of games. Thus, the common features of all chairs one can think of are 'surface and back'. No matter what kind of surface it is and what kind of back it has, at least there is a surface as well as a back for each chair, and the function of a chair is 'to sit on'. Thus, the 'surface', the 'back' and the 'to sit on' form three necessary criteria for a central concept of a chair. But they are not sufficient, as one may argue that a bench in a park also shares all of these three criteria. Nevertheless, in thinking of this way, it at least helps us to distinguish what 'non-chairs' are. For example, if one takes the feature of a 'back' out of a 'chair', then a 'chair' is no longer a 'chair'. It may be called a 'stool'.

Can this apply to the concept of sport? Sports are concerned with human activities, which cannot exist without engaging human actions and without considering the context. If the notion of essential features of all games are 'playing' and 'rules' are accepted, then the essential features of sport, I argue, have to do with 'playing', 'doing' or 'practising' and participants' 'skillful movement'. The former feature is concerned with participants' 'attitude' towards a particular activity they conceive, whereas the latter, participants' non-verbal actions or behaviour. For example, one can *play* a squash game, *do* an aerobic session and *practise* a swimming stroke. Those activities not only involve one's attitude but also one's skillful movement. Playing, doing or practising is a verb form and has to do with one's intentionality[9] to make a particular sporting activity actually happen and meaningful. Participants are aware of the fact that they are 'playing', 'doing' or 'practising' a particular sport with their skill movement and thus making such a sporting activity actually happen, make it meaningful or lend meaning to it. However, one thing must be stressed is that they are just essential and

necessary rather than sufficient conditions of sport. Therefore, it is understandable that one could stipulate and add more criteria for sport such as 'game', 'competition', 'rules' or all of above.

2. Sport as an Ongoing 'Evolving' Concept

By acknowledging the essence of sport, it is possible to understand why sport is hard to define if we treat sports as essentially attitude-oriented and skillful movement. While most recognize that physical skill or physical prowess is the central component of sport, some other characteristics are still in a debatable situation (such as competition, games, institutionalization, work, etc), as they might be included or expanded. This assumption can help us to acknowledge why there is a narrow concept of sport as well as a broad concept of sport. It can also be derived from a review of the historical and cultural development of sport.

From the historical point of view, it is reasonable to understand why sport did not necessarily have to involve criteria such as 'rules' or other elements. A very important reason has to do with the original root of the term's usage. The term 'sport' derives from the French determined Middle-English verb 'sporten', to *divert* (verb). The emphasis is therefore on it being a distraction, something that gives pleasure. It has much to do with the attitude of participants. Thus, it is comprehensible to see why 'hunting' and 'fishing' have been regarded as sport since the Middle-Ages, not because they simply involve 'rules' or 'games'.

From the cultural development point of view, it was suggested that 'sport is primarily an extension of play, and that it rests upon and derives its central values from play (Schmitz, 1979, p. 22)'. However, that view is no longer sufficient to reflect and explain the multiple facets of sporting activities in modern times. The appearance of professional sports has ruled out the possibilities of the *pure* 'playful' attitude of the participants and the nature of play (non-profit oriented), since professional sports have become part of elite participants' way of life and livelihood.

Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the term 'sport' has shifted from part of its original meaning 'hunting' to 'athletic and competitive games' or 'physical competition' from about the eighteenth century, because many more activities have been invented or reformed through the period of modernization. It can be seen from recent English dictionaries that 'physical (or bodily)' and 'competition' are included as the main characteristics of sporting activities. In spite of this shift and the change of those special characteristics of the activities, the essence of sport remains (i.e. playing, doing or practicing and skillful movement). In view of this, I

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[9] I am aware of Tamboer's (1992, p. 41) suggestion of the three components of a motor action, namely:
  (1) The person-actor with respect to his or her primarily displacing-directed intentionality.
  (2) The world, as it affords such an intentionality (for example, something to grasp, to throw away, to climb up, to jump from).
  (3) The manner of displacing, in terms of spatio-temporal relations (in verbs such as, e.g., high jumping, long jumping, and synchronized jumping or timing).
    My interpretation of the essence of sport (playing, doing or practising and skillful movement) is related to the above three components, but it is not necessarily displacing-directed.

contend that this is a very instructive insight. This can explain why sport does have *potential* to develop into multiple forms if we treat sport as an attitude-oriented skillful movement and a socially (conventionally) collective concept. That is to say, people tend to associate one activity with another activity and group them together within a same category.

Owing to the period of postmodernization[10], it can be understood why sports have developed into a multiform domain in some of the Western societies. The distinguishing feature of sports in some communities is no longer based on the traditional view (i.e. physical skill, competition, games, etc) but more on the *attitude or motive* of those participants in a particular society. In other words, it depends on how certain communities *value* their sporting activities. As Crum (1993) suggests:

> While, as I assume, in North America the label 'sport' is generally reserved for activities with a physical contest character, in West Europe the term 'sport' has progressively been eroded. More and more activities are more frequently called 'sport'. 'Sport' varies from baby-swimming to gymnastics for the elderly, from a casual vacation walk in the hills to the endless practice of the very young gymnast girl, from a chess tournament to a double triathlon, from the obligatory sport at school or on the job (police, fire brigade) to the sportive animation in the Club Mediterranee, from the torture on the chromed apparatus in the fitness centre to the jogging through the forest, from the Chicago Bulls against the Phoenix Suns to the basketball game of the boys at the local play ground, from the perilous Formula-1 racing to the rehabilitation sport of heart patients (Crum, 1993, p. 2).

If the above view is accepted, then the concept of sport becomes an ongoing 'evolving' concept. That the concept of sport has been broadening in recent years has so much to do with the cultural evolution in certain communities around the world.

In summary, it might be suggested that to recognize that the essence of sport is concerned with participants' attitudes and skillful movement, and to treat sport as a social concept still does not get us very far. However, at least this enable us to understand why the term 'sport' is hard to define and why it can be regarded as an ongoing 'evolving' concept.

3. The Duty of Philosophers of Sport

By recognizing sport as an 'evolving' social concept, one can acknowledge that there will probably be many more ongoing potential sports. Either sports are taken from existing activities or they are constructed or reconstructed from other sports [11]. Of course, confusion of and debate between members of the public domain regarding whether certain activities are sports will continue, and there are always demands to define sport from different perspectives such as laws[12], resource distribution, or for other reasons[13].

Because of the existence of different conceptions of sport and the possible ongoing debate, it is crucial that researchers of sport, even if they do not reach a common consensus, should all be clear at the very least about what they are talking about when addressing the 'sports issues' in their research. It is necessary to clearly identify the boundaries of sports, since one could always raise the question: Do your 'sports issues' cover chess, bridge, darts, dance, aerobics, bull fighting, hunting, fishing, Tai-Chi, sun-bathing, or other contested activities?

VI. CONCLUDING SUMMARY

In this paper, I have explored and clarified two major views on the concept of sport – i.e. the narrow (closed) concept and the broad (open) concept – and shown some of their potential difficulties. The major difficulty for those who hold the narrow concept of sport is that there is no final justification if their intention is to give a valid or absolute definition of sport in an empirical sense in order to articulate the 'essence' of sport.

However, if one understands Suits, Meier, and Kretchmar and others as trying to suggest a reasonable interpretation of sport to provide an understanding of the phenomenon and, perhaps, develop tools in philosophical and conceptual work with sport, then the critique of final reasons to accept the suggested definition is inadequate.

By contrast, on account of the open concept, there are also two major problems for those who hold non-essentialists' claims. There are the problems of uncritical usage and

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[10] According to Crum (1993, pp. 2-4), the postmodern era is characterized by a parting of the values, views and lifestyles which were formed according to the traditions of enlightenment, rationalism and industrial revolution. It is the shift towards postmaterialist values, the craving for self-realization, the trend to individualization and the rediscovery of the body.

[11] For example, triathlon is a sport which combines swimming, cycling and running.
[12] For example, the British Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR, 1994: 3) points out that 'the crucial question for sport and one which goes to the heart of the law Commission's proposal is what is a "recognised sport" and who should be responsible for "recognition". The basis on which the exemption for sport is to apply is if an activity is a "recognized" sport or game. If the courts do not think a particular sport or game is "recognised", then the normal rules for offences against the person will apply and the participants will not be protected by any exemption for sport'.
[13] This of course can be explained in great detail from the sociological or political point view (e.g. Sports Council grant-aid or VAT exemption). However, I shall confine myself within the main scope of this section - The duty of philosophers of sport.

acceptance of sport, and the problems of applying Wittgenstein's (1974) notion of 'family resemblances' to the field for a better understanding of sport.

In order to grasp a better understanding of sport, I have argued that the essence of sports has to do with the attitude of participants ('playing', 'doing' or 'practising') and their skillful movement. I have also argued that the concept of sport can be seen as an 'evolving' concept. Because there are different conceptions of sport, sports researchers should be clear about what they mean when talking about 'sports issues'.

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