ISSA Proceedings 1998 – ‘Three Strikes’ And ‘Hail Mary’ Passes: Sports Metaphors In Public Argument

The language of sports permeates public argument in the United States. In his study of the role played by sport and game in American culture, Oriard (1991: ix) suggests that sports metaphors are significant as they contain “American ideas not just about sport and play themselves, but about all the things for which sport and play have become emblems – heroism, success, gender, race, class, the law, religion, salvation; the relations of Humankind, God, and Nature.”

References to sport, either general or specific, are more than linguistic decoration. Invoking a sports metaphor can have profound implications on the discussion of competing policy alternatives. Since it would be impossible to do justice to all sports metaphors in a single work, this essay focuses on a series of sports used in two notable public arguments in America during the early 1990s. By analogizing criminals to baseball players, proponents of “three strikes” legislation have effectively masked underlying social and economic inequities that plague our society. Likewise, by analogizing American military intervention against Iraq to a football game, proponents of intervention in the Persian Gulf justified the use of force and legitimated our grand military strategy and battlefield tactics. While some claim that sports are ideology-free, repeated references to sports metaphors function to reinforce a dominant political ideology and authorize political action. This conclusion is not meant to damn sports, but rather to suggest that seemingly innocuous sports metaphors can, in fact, constitute a subtle, yet powerful form of argument.

This thesis is developed in more detail in the pages that follow. The first two sections of the essay document the use of the “three strikes” metaphor in public argument over criminal justice and a series of football metaphors in the public argument over American intervention in Iraq. Having documented the widespread usage of these metaphors, the next two sections consider how these metaphors

functioned as analogic arguments for a particular set of policy options.

1. "Three Strikes and You're Out"

Americans have grown increasingly concerned about crime over the past decade. According to Wilson (1994: 26), crime "was not a major issue in the 1984 presidential election and had only begun to be one in the 1988 contest; by 1992, it was challenging the economy as a popular concern and today it dominates all other matters. " In a 1994 survey, Americans listed "crime and violence as the number-one problem facing the nation, far surpassing worries over the economy or health care" (Pettinico 1994: 29). To a large extent, this concern reflected the belief that crime was growing worse. Reports in the popular press, for example, routinely reported on innocent citizens who had fallen prey to career criminals. These horrific narratives take on new meaning when accompanied by statistics showing crime growing ever more violent.

Given the public clamor, it is not surprising that politicians from "both parties, from cities and suburbs, and from all regions of the nation are scrambling to establish a tough position regarding crime" (Pettinico 1994: 32). While some have advocated social programs stressing prevention or rehabilitation, retribution has come to dominate the political debate. National leaders have argued, with considerable eloquence and vigor, that swift and certain punishment is more effective than social programs purporting to target the causes of crime. If a crime is punished by probation, advocates have argued for incarceration; if the sentence for a crime is ten years, advocates have proposed that it be doubled; if the sentence is life, advocates have suggested the death penalty.

Many prominent legislators quickly latched on to the "three strikes" metaphor. By analogizing criminals to baseball players, it was easy to justify the harsh sentence of life in prison for offenders guilty of committing three qualifying crimes. At the same time it justifies punishment, the metaphor also appeals to a fundamental sense of justice as it suggests everyone receives three chances to abide by the law. While there was limited discussion of three strikes in public argument about crime before 1993, the three strikes metaphor became the dominant metaphor in the crime debate of 1994.

One of the first substantive references to the metaphor appeared in the *New York Times* on 24 October 1993. In an article about Initiative 593 in Washington state, Timothy Egan (1993: 14) described a measure called "Three Strikes and You're Out." According to the article, this initiative "would mean that any person

convicted of a third felony in a category labeled 'most serious' would go to jail for life without chance of parole." Two months later, the *Times* reported on an effort to obtain signatures for a similar initiative in California (Gross 1993).

By 25 January 1994, the *New York Times* was reporting that "3-Strike Sentencing Is a Solid Hit This Season" (Fisher 1994: B1). The same article reported that the idea had been endorsed by Governor Wilson in California, Governor Whitman in New Jersey, and Governor Cuomo in New York. In his 1994 State of the Union address, President Clinton (1994: A16) joined those clamoring for tougher sentences:

First, we must recognize that most violent crimes are committed by a small percentage of criminals, who too often break the laws even when they're on parole. Now those who commit crimes should be punished. And those who commit repeated violent crimes should be told when you commit a third violent crime you will be put away and put away for good. Three strikes, and you are out.

By May of 1994, three strikes legislation was pending in 30 different states. Meanwhile, the United States Congress, which had already enacted four major bills aimed at reducing the crime rate since 1984, hastily scheduled hearings on a new crime bill. While this measure included more money for police officers and prisons, it also contained a three strikes provision.

A detailed analysis of the arguments advanced on behalf of the crime bill is beyond the scope of this analysis. Nonetheless, it is instructive to briefly consider how the three strikes metaphor was invoked in this debate. From a review of the legislative debate published in the *Congressional Record* it is clear that the most common argument advanced in support of the crime bill was simply that the legislation was tough on criminals. Time and again, advocates claimed three strikes legislation was an aggressive measure to combat crime. For example, Representative Hoyer (1994: H8994) proclaimed, "I am very pleased that this bill includes the 'three strikes and you are out' … provision (that) says to repeat violent offenders that they have forfeited their rights to be members of our society and that they will go to jail forever." Senator Sarbanes (1994: S12320) observed that the crime bill "has the three strikes-and-you-are-out provision, imposing a life sentence for a third violent felony. So it tightens and makes tougher our punishment system." According to Representative Hoagland (1994: H8952), "Truth in sentencing, forcing violent offenders to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences, a ban on military-style assault weapons, tough

punishment like three strikes and you are out, and other provisions nationally that will help."

The logic behind such reasoning was simple. As Senator DeConcini (1994: S12138) proclaimed, "The three strikes-and-you're-out provision will take violent predator criminals off the streets and keep them in prison where they belong." A more substantive, yet equally representative, explanation was offered by Senator Dorgan (1994: S12240): About two-thirds of all violent crime in America is committed by about 8 percent of the criminals. These are criminals who adopted crime as a career, and they understand and we understand that prison for them has become a revolving door. They are in and they are out and in and out and back on the streets far too quickly – to victimize another innocent American once again. This bill starts to get tough with them and says three strikes and you are out. In the words of Representative Bishop (1994: H2259), three strikes legislation would protect society from "those who repeatedly demonstrate a disregard for the sanctity of human life."

Even those who opposed the crime bill invoked the three strikes metaphor. Not surprisingly given the political climate, one of the most common criticisms of the crime bill was that the three strikes provision was limited to a small subset of potential criminal acts. For example, Representative Smith (1994: H8947) of Texas this bill is flawed. The third strike must be a Federal crime. Only 5 percent of violent crimes are Federal crimes. So, this bill will only affect a few hundred criminals every year." For our purposes, even richer imagery was offered by Representative Dornan (1994: H7964).

Another celebrated component of the crime bill is the "three strikes and you're out" provision. While this may sound tough, it is not. In fact, this sentencing provision will only apply to 1 percent of the crimes that occur throughout the country, since the third crime occurs on federal property for it to be eligible for this new punishment. If baseball adopted a similar rule, you would be out only if the third strike occurred in, say, Fenway Park.

Although many complained that the crime bill was too soft on crime, some liberal legislators objected to the punitive philosophy it embraced. Senator Pell (1994: S12421) claimed that he was troubled by the "endorsement of the three-strikes-and-you're-out provision in the bill and the heavy emphasis on incarceration and inflexible punishment rather than crime prevention." This was troublesome as criminals sentenced under three strikes would spend the remainder of their life in prison living at taxpayer expense. Representative Trafficant (1994: H8988)

warned “three strikes and you’re out” would require “providing room, board, and free medical care to 70, 80, and 90 year olds who have long since passed their crime committing years will cost the states and the federal government untold amounts of money.”

These objections notwithstanding, different versions of the crime bill were eventually passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. After extensive discussion about the range of crimes covered by the three strikes clauses, legislators eventually produced compromise legislation that was adopted by both houses and signed by the president. In his 1995 State of the Union Address, President Clinton (1995: 17) used the following language to characterize the final crime bill: “But I remind you that last year we passed a very tough crime bill – longer sentences, three strikes and you’re out, almost 60 new capital punishment offenses, more prisons, more prevention, 100,000 more police …”

Taken together, this discussion illustrates the importance of the three strikes metaphor in the debate over the crime bill. The metaphor was used by the President in his 1994 and 1995 State of the Union Addresses. Prominent politicians of both parties invoked the metaphor to demonstrate their personal resolve to combat crime. Even those who opposed harsher sentences relied on the language of baseball in their discourse. Indeed, the rhetorical appeal of three strikes was so strong that some advocates felt compelled to invoke different metaphors drawn from baseball when discussing crime. In Georgia, Governor Zell Miller thought “three strikes” was too generous to criminals. As an alternative, he proposed a “two strikes and you’re out” crime bill and welfare reform based on “two strikes and you’re off” (“Ever tilting at welfare windmills” 1995: A12).

Another opponent of three strikes legislation, Reverend Jesse Jackson, attempted to argue against three strikes by invoking competing baseball metaphors. Instead of “three strikes,” Jackson said he favored a “four-balls-and-your-on” approach. According to Jackson, ball one would be adequate prenatal care and access to the Head Start program, ball two would be an affordable education, ball three would be job skills, and ball four would be a job. Instead of retribution, Jackson developed the metaphor of the walk to argue for more entitlements (Kilbourne 1994).

2. The Big Game

In the debate over intervention in Iraq, political leaders sought easy ways to characterize political and military events in the Mideast and to justify an aggressive American response. While a review of this discourse suggests a wide

range of metaphors, the most common were drawn from the American game of football. By analogizing military intervention in the Mideast to football it was possible to situate the game, identify the competing teams and their star players, discuss strategy and tactics, and even conduct a post-game analysis explaining the decisive coaching moves.

Since multiple football metaphors were invoked in discourse about Desert Storm, it is helpful to integrate the metaphors into a larger story. A good place to begin is with the respective leaders. Both George Bush and Saddam Hussein were repeatedly likened to "coaches preparing for the Super Bowl" (McCarthy 1991: F2). Just as these political leaders were identified as coaches, so too were the leading military commanders. Sometimes the title was assigned by general/coach" Schwarzkopf (Evans 1991: C25). Other times the title was claimed, as when Lieutenant General Calvin A. H. Waller, the second-ranking officer in Operation Desert Shield behind Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, said "I'm like a football coach. I want everything I can possibly get and have at my side of the field when I get ready to go into the Super Bowl" (Ready or not? 1990: A1).

Indeed, those who were critical of national leaders frequently denigrated their coaching skills. Senator Bob Kerry, an early critic of the decision to deploy American forces in the Gulf, accused President Bush of being more of "a little league football coach more than a commander in chief" (Kondracke 1991: 10), while another commentator likened Bush to "a high-school football coach on the eve of the Big Game" (Fineman & Thomas 1991: 37). In an even less flattering comparison, another critic complained that "Listening to the two coaches, Saddam of the Eye Pluckers and Bush of the Butt Kickers, it sounded a lot like the old mine's-bigger-than-your's contest" (Anderson 1991: C1).

As every fan knows, an integral part of coaching is the creation of a game plan. Just like a football game, each of the teams in the Gulf War had a different game plan. Coach Bush's "game plan," according to the analysts, "If not from the beginning, certainly from very early on was to bring Iraq to its knees by flattening it with overwhelming military force" (Payton 1991: 3A). According to Assistant Coach Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this game-plan has a "ground component. Despite protestations to the contrary, most observers assume it also envisages a short, violent war – summed up by Mr. Bush's repeated pledge that 'this will not be another Vietnam'" (Barber 1991: 2). In sharp contrast, opposing coach "Saddam Hussein's game plan (is) to drag out the conflict long enough to split up the coalition against him and to inflict enough

American casualties to make the American public demand an end to the war" (Greenway 1991: 1).

Once the coach determines the game plan, he needs to name a starting lineup. In this instance, many commentators were more impressed at who was left on the bench. Coach Bush, intent on executing his game plan without delay, intentionally chose to leave Congress "standing on the sidelines" (Scally 1991). Several other key players also languished on the bench for different reasons. "During the current Persian Gulf crisis," Coach Bush later rationalized, "Israel has been on the sidelines" (Bratman 1990: 11). Further, after the outcome of the game was safely in hand, it was reported that "Saudi Arabia is agreeing to take part on the sidelines because President Bush made it clear that that was the least it could do to thank Washington for saving it from Iraq" (Friedman 1991: A8).

The use of football metaphors went well beyond the talk of coaches and the game plan. All the battles were fought on the playing field with "yard markers and goal posts" (Fineman & Thomas 1991: 37). As in football, the goal was to advance into enemy territory and gain ground. When some commentators questioned whether war could be averted, Coach Bush responded that he was "not moving the goal posts to achieve peace in the region" (Kurkjian 1990: 1). Just as it would be unthinkable to change the length of the playing field after the game started, it was not possible to change policy goals once the game had started.

Having cast the war as a football game, it makes sense to compare the start of hostilities to the start of the game. As game time approached, correspondents prepared for battle, "treating the midnight deadline more as the hour for a scheduled kickoff than as the mark to measure the beginning of Saddam Hussein's borrowed time" (Pruden 1991: A4). Offering humorous commentary on the kickoff after the game, winning coach Norman Schwarzkopf recalled announcing to his soldiers, "Iraq has won the toss and elected to receive" (Adams 1992). The same message appeared on a sign outside the main American base (Bush 1991), and on the bulletin board in the press hotel in Riyadh (McClellan 1991). Of course, in this case, receiving did not mean receiving the kickoff, but rather referred to receiving an American air attack.

After the game had started, the ensuing battle was often described through football metaphors. Coach Bush, for example, frequently "huddled" with his advisers (Alexander 1992: A1). The allied attack featured a vaunted "ground game" (Freeman 1991: E-6) based on a range of "running plays" (Evans 1991: C25) designed to protect the "ball carrier" (Hanchette 1990). At the same time,

the allied defense planned to hold “him (opposing star, Saddam Hussein) to the line” (Dowd 1991: A1). Allied strategy also made use of excellent “special teams, such as the combat engineers who breached Iraqi minefields and the Patriot missileers, to whom the label ‘Scudbusters’ seems to have stuck like Velcro” (Evans 1991: C25).

Other football metaphors abound. President Bush complained about “a total stiff-arm” from Saddam Hussein when describing the failure of diplomacy to prevent conflict (The edge of the abyss 1991: 20). When Congress took up the issue, critics charged that “the first impulse of many Members was to punt” (Madison 1991: 104). Mistakes in policy, such as the ill-fated courtship of Iraq prior to the invasion of Kuwait, were referred to as “fumbles” (Phillips 1990: M1) and much was made of the success of Patriot missiles in “intercepting” Scud missiles thrown by Iraq during the war. (Apple 1991: 1). Finally, after early success, one commentator warned that “Scoring the first touchdown is one thing; having the ingredients to go the distance is quite another. The most difficult plays are yet to come” (Shielding the world from Iraq 1990: 14).

Even after the game was completed, there were even more football metaphors during the ubiquitous post game analysis. The allied victory was so decisive that it “leveled the Arab playing field” (Gelb 1991: A25). Despite the margin of victory, some of the winning players complained about the behavior of their opponents. Some lamented the “cheap shots of Young Republicans against Democrats in Congress who participated in free debate” (Ruthazer 1991: 9A), while others complained about “cheap shots by Republicans against Democrats who voted against the war powers resolution on Iraq” (Shepard 1991: 4). Even in victory, Coach Bush found himself compelled to respond to “Monday morning quarterbacks” who blame him for “Saddam’s continued aggression because the Iraqi dictator wasn’t toppled in the 1991 Persian Gulf War” (Fort Hood troops head for Gulf 1996: 1) and “hindsight quarterbacks who are insisting that allied forces should have acted more decisively in March of 1991″ (Kilpatrick 1992: A12).

There was, however, one football metaphor that dominates all others. It is the characterization of the successful strategy of flanking Iraq’s army as a “Hail Mary” strategy. Those familiar with American football will, of course, recognize the “Hail Mary” as a desperate attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat with a long pass into the opposing endzone as time expires. In retrospect, it may be difficult to understand how this metaphor could have been invoked to describe

the complete route of the Iraqi army. To make the image work, Coach Schwarzkopf (1991: A6) created a situation in which his team faced the most desperate of circumstances: Basically, the problem we were faced with was this:…. As far as fighting troops, we were really outnumbered 2 to 1. In addition to that, they had about 4,700 tanks vs. our 3,500 when the buildup was complete, and they had a great deal more artillery than we do. I think any student of military strategy would tell you that in order to attack a position, you should have a ratio of approximately 3 to 1 in favor of the attacker. And in order to attack a position that is heavily dug in and barricaded, such as the one we had here, you should have a ratio of 5 to 1, in the way of troops, in favor of the attacker…. What we did, of course, was start an extensive air campaign…. One of the purposes of that extensive air campaign was to isolate the Kuwaiti theater of operation by taking out all the bridges and supply lines that ran between the North and the southern part of Iraq. We also conducted a very heavy bombing campaign…. It was necessary to reduce these forces down to a strength that…. made them weaker, particularly on the front-line barrier that we had to go through…. Once we had taken out his eyes, we did what could best be described as the "Hail Mary" play in football.

In a vast sweeping motion, the allied army swept around the flank of the Iraqi line. The play, explained by Coach Schwarzkopf with a reference to a "football playbook" (Wickham 1991: 10C), went for a huge gain. After the allied army successfully executed the "end run" (Chamberlain 1991: 76), they found only "second-string" Iraqi players (Davis 1993: C5) and they swept to metaphoric *victory.*

3. Criminals as Batters

Sports metaphors are powerful rhetorical devices because they translate abstract concepts into vivid images. At the same time, sports metaphors have persuasive power as they draw powerful analogies. By framing an issue, metaphors structure arguments and limit discussion. This is particularly true, it appears, with respects to the baseball and football metaphors discussed in this paper.

"No game in the world," Paul Gallico has written, "is as tidy and dramatically neat as baseball, with cause and effect, crime and punishment, motive and results so clearly defined" (cited in Skolnik 1994: 192). There is, it seems, considerable truth in this observation as it pertains to the three strikes metaphor. After three strikes, the batter goes to the dugout; after three crimes, the criminal goes to jail. The three strikes metaphor, however, functions as more than an analogy for a

particular sentence. Not only does it describe a policy proposal, it also argues criminals have had a fair chance and reasons that their repeated strikes against ordered society justify incarceration for life.

A careful examination of the three strikes metaphor reveals that it is predicated on a series of ideological assumptions drawn from the baseball diamond. First, the three strikes metaphor suggests we live in an idealized world. In baseball, the batter stands in a fixed spot and uses a regulated bat to swing at an official ball thrown from a pitching mound of a prescribed height. While there are other players on the field, the batter alone faces the pitcher and the batter's success depends largely on the batter's own talent. If the ball is hit into play, the batter runs a clearly defined course around the bases with the goal of returning to the same spot from whence he started. In this sense, Messenger (1994) has observed that "baseball has a logic that appears almost Newtonian."

There is, however, a great deal left unsaid in this simple description of America's past time. The rules of baseball, for example, assume that all players share certain talents. While some might be more gifted than others, all players have an equal chance to hit the ball. No matter how inept, everyone in the game eventually gets their turn at the plate. Moreover, baseball is a team sport. While the batter alone faces the pitcher, all batters are part of a larger team that struggles together toward a common goal. In the interest of winning, individuals frequently sacrifice their place for the greater good. Since everyone on the team benefits when the team wins, players do not seek individual glory at the expense of their teammates. Second, the three strikes metaphor suggests a perfected system of justice based on the assent of the players. The official rules of the game are codified in book form. Balls and strikes are clearly and reasonably defined by an objective set of criteria. In fact, arguing balls and strikes is against the rules and grounds for expulsion from the game. Deviations from these rules required by a particular ball park are communicated by the umpire as ground rules before the game. While the rules of the game must be applied by the umpire to specific situations, the rules themselves are not negotiated before the game or even renegotiated during each game. The rules are sacred and timeless, and therefore, statistics compiled over decades are meaningful.

Not only are the rules of the game objectified, but the rules derive their power entirely from the consent of the participants. Players and managers occasionally protest calls made by the umpire, but even clearly erroneous calls cannot be reversed by an appeal to higher authority except under the most extraordinary of circumstances. The participants freely agree to abide by the decision of the

umpire and their acquiescence to the authority of the umpire is necessary to make the game possible. Observing this fact, Novak (1994: 59) suggests "baseball is a Lockean game, a kind of contract theory in ritual form, a set of atomic individuals who assent to patterns of limited cooperation in their mutual interest."
Finally, the three strikes metaphor suggests minimal, and even transitory, consequences for failure on the diamond. This is not to say that errors in baseball are soon forgotten. Baseball legend and lore abounds with stories involving bad bounces, bad calls, missed opportunities, and the like. So too, failure as a batter is remembered "Every play," Skolnik (1994: 157) writes, "nearly every move is recorded, then registered, within a host of related categories deemed important for describing action and accounting for the outcome."
But in baseball, errors in the field or poor hitting are neither unexpected or fatal. Failure is inevitable; salvation is expected. Each time the ball is hit, a fielder has an opportunity to make a play. Poor hitters have been saved by particularly adept fielding. So too, the fallen hitter has another chance for glory the very next time he returns to the plate. As Ted Williams, one of the greatest hitters in the history of the game, sagely observed, baseball is the "only field of endeavor where a man can succeed three times out of ten and be considered a good performer" (quoted in Stinson 1993: B21).

When one considers these assumptions, it becomes readily apparent that advocates who invoke the three strikes metaphor are doing more than simply describing the appropriate sentence for a crime. Under closer examination, it can be seen that the three strikes metaphor constitutes a powerful argument for a particular view of our criminal justice system. By invoking the metaphor, advocates are able to imply that criminals (batters) are responsible for their own behavior. Every criminal (batter) has an equal chance at success as the rules apply to all. Judges (umpires) fairly administer justice, and defendants (batters) are not allowed to contest rulings (balls and strikes). All criminals (batters) will be held strictly accountable for their behavior. The appropriate penalty for striking out is life in prison (returning to the dugout).
When invoked in the crime debate, this metaphor functions to legitimize a conservative judicial system. By citing the three strikes metaphor, advocates invoke imagery that justifies punishment. At the same time, advocates who use the metaphor are able to argue that individuals should be held responsible for their behavior, that the judicial system is fair and equitable, and that criminals deserve their punishment. When understood from this perspective, the three

strikes metaphor constitutes a powerful ideological argument. The metaphor not only describes a sentence, it argues for a particular worldview.

Of course, under close scrutiny it becomes readily apparent that the three strikes metaphor has dubious parallels to criminal justice. In fact, each of the aforementioned assumptions might be seriously questioned by an observer of our judicial system. Criminals do not live in an idealized world. We know that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by the uneducated, the disadvantaged, and the unemployed. Recent research on children has suggested that "temperament, early family experiences, and neighborhood effects" are significant predictors of criminal activity (Wilson 1994: 27). While more might be said, it is readily apparent that many criminals are playing with numerous competitive disadvantages. In the game of life, players who have an education have a better chance of hitting a pitch than those without an education. Children raised in abusive situations, without appropriate parental roles, are far more likely to strike out. In the words of Diggs (1994: 25), "'three strikes and you're out' plays ball on a field of dreams, but we live in an America that is undeniably real – a contemporary, largely urban scene of increasing unpleasantness, complexity, diversity, interdependency and, ultimately, of incomparable creativity and resourcefulness." Given the disparity in opportunity and experience, analogies to the idealized confrontation between the batter and the pitcher on the baseball diamond become increasingly strained.

Finally, criminals are held strictly accountable for their behavior under the new crime legislation. While batters may be redeemed, a criminal convicted of a third qualifying felony will spend the remainder of life in prison. Baseball's history begins anew each time a game begins; each time a batter assumes a position in the batter's box. The game is ongoing, hence there is always a chance for salvation. Perhaps this explains why some of base-ball's greatest hitters are fondly remembered as heroic figures, despite a penchant for striking out on a regular basis. In contrast, under the new crime bill, a criminal convicted of three qualifying crimes is banished from the game and permanently imprisoned. If the life sentence is truly enforced, salvation is impossible as the player has been forever removed from society.

4. War as Football

While football offers a convenient vocabulary for describing different aspects of Desert Storm, it is important to remember that these metaphors also express a particular set of values. Safire (1982: A27) has insightfully observed,

“professional football is the central metaphor of our times, combining strategy with power, grace with violence, sportsmanship with brinkmanship.” Recognizing the power of such images, Hardaway (1985: 581) has suggested “that sports metaphors become not merely ways of revealing our adolescent preoccupation with aggressiveness, with winning, with games, but also ways of perpetuating those concerns, of glorifying them, of passing them on unexamined to our children through our national culture.”

Although fundamentally different than baseball, like baseball, football is also a game with formal rules which are enforced by impartial referees. Penalties are clearly defined by an objective set of criteria. While the rules of the game must be applied by the referee to specific situations, the rules themselves are not negotiated before the game or even renegotiated during each game. The rules are sacred and timeless, and therefore, statistics compiled over decades are meaningful. Both teams have the same number of players. Teams alternate possession of the ball, meaning that both teams have an equal number of opportunities to score. With the exception of the point after a touchdown, as soon as one team scores points on the other, it must surrender the ball to the opposing team.

Due to the nature of the sport, football requires an unusual amount of teamwork. To be successful, a large number of people playing different roles, united by a common game plan, are forced to cooperate for the greater good. The athletes are highly skilled, but their individual performances are necessarily subservient to the larger effort. Each player assumes a position, and the team can succeed only if each player sacrifices their own autonomy for the team. This sentiment is perhaps best expressed in words attributed to the late Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers: “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.”

While much might be said about the way football metaphors function in the public argument about military intervention against Iraq, there is space to consider but two of the more obvious implications. First, repeated references to football metaphors functioned to idealize war. Unlike football, where each team is of a prescribed size, there was a wide disparity between the competing armies that take the field and there was no limit to the number of players on the field at any given point in time. So too, there are seldom agreed rules for fighting a war. In the case of Desert Storm, for example, there were legitimate questions about the appropriate use of weapons of mass destruction, efforts to destroy the environment, and whether it is ethical to target civilian populations. Even today,

there is widespread disagreement whether Desert Storm was a success or a failure. While it is undoubtedly true that the allied forces forced Iraq to surrender, it is no longer clear whether the allies won the war. Given recent events in the Mideast, some critics now complain that the allies lost the war because Saddam Hussein remains in power.

A second implication, perhaps not as obvious, is even more troubling. The use of football metaphors tends to constrain argumentative ground and minimize discussion of policy alternatives. Sports are about winning and losing, not about discussion and debate.

As Balbus (1975: 578) insightfully observes, "The goal of sports activity is always unambiguous and non-controversial; participants do not come together to discuss or debate the ends for which the activity has been established, but rather take this end for granted and apply themselves in a single-minded fashion to the task of developing the most efficient means to achieve the predetermined unchanging and non-controversial end: winning."

In the case of Desert Storm, the choice of metaphors is crucial as it limits the choice of available policy alternatives. By casting the war as a football game, those offering the metaphor discourage dialogue and preclude criticism. Instead of arguing about whether intervention is appropriate, the metaphor focuses attention on waging war. This shift in focus is significant, for it transforms the discussion from ends to means. At the same time, the emphasis on the team further discourages criticism as everyone knows that teams are not a forum for grievances, but rather groups organized for a specific purpose.

5. Conclusions

The repeated use of the sports metaphors to characterize public policy, generally without explanation or qualification, clearly proves that sports are an integral part of American society. Smith (1973: 39) grasps the obvious when he writes that "One measure of the stature of sports in the American scheme is the extent to which sporting terms are employed away from the playing fields." The ability of advocates to invoke a sports metaphor without explanation demonstrates that Americans share a collective familiarity with such games and justifies the claim that sports are an essential element of American culture. Recognizing the importance of such usages, Lakoff and Turner (1989: 214) have suggested that "to study metaphor is to be confronted with hidden aspects of one's own mind and one's own culture."

The three strikes legislation widely discussed in America today draws heavily on

the idealized world of baseball. While this appeal to baseball explains a penalty, it also rationalizes retribution against criminals. This reasoning is potentially dangerous, as there are profound differences between sports like baseball and the administration of justice. Along the same lines, invoking a football metaphor does more than characterize military action; it legitimates a particular strategy and tactics. While the resulting policies may be reassuring to many Americans, such sports metaphors functions ideologically to justify policy, while simultaneously silencing criticism. If we are to engage in meaningful public argument, we need to be fully cognizant of the ideological blinders imposed by our choice of metaphors.

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