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The athlete as citizen: judgement and rhetorical invention in sport

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The prevailing wisdom in the USA is that sport and politics should not mix. Accordingly, highly paid professional athletes are often criticized when they express their views about politics. This essay argues that athletes have every right to be political and that sport is a productive site for thinking about engaged citizenship. The argument grounds citizenship not in national identity but in the rhetorical tradition's emphasis on public discourse and democracy. Specifically, citizenship can be seen as a means of enacting a form of judgement that is active and artistic, and constitutes new possibilities for public interaction. Three examples – Andy Roddick, Scott Fujita, and Steve Nash – demonstrate how this form of judgement can work in sport.

Introduction

Although prevailing wisdom in the USA maintains that sport and politics do not mix, from time to time athletes are invited to comment on political issues or events. For example, players in New York spoke frequently, at times eloquently, about the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and their effects on the community and nation. Ten years later, several retrospectives commemorating the 10th anniversary of 9/11 featured the memories of athletes and coaches. Meanwhile, major national elections also provide moments during which voices from sport are placed in the context of larger national discourses. This was perhaps most obvious during the 2008 presidential campaign, when the election of the nation's first African American president held special resonance in high profile sports that are well represented by non-white participants. Yet, in spite of these moments, many observers and fans remain uncomfortable with political speech from their favourite athletes. Writing in the context of the 2006 mid-term elections, ESPN's Jeff Pearlman worried that sports are so isolating, especially at the professional level, athletes are functionally incapable of being informed about political matters. As he states, 'when push comes to shove, no population in society is less qualified to guide votes than pro athletes'.¹ This is a reflection of the broader sentiment that Dave Zirin argues drives commentary about sport and politics. Athletes are reminded they should simply be grateful for the opportunity to play sports, he insists, so much so that they should just 'shut up and play'.²

Critiques of athletes who get too 'political' are often strongest among fans, many of whom conclude that the large sums of money paid to professional athletes should be reason enough to keep them from voicing their opinions about politics. This entails both criticisms of athletes who appear ungrateful for their considerable incomes and of those who defend athletes for remaining apolitical so as to protect their opportunities to earn greater income through endorsements. Yet, these common views are problematic on at

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least two levels: they deny that the terrain of sport is already politicized and they undercut the athlete's role as *citizen*. In the words of Peter Kaufman and Eli Wolff:

But there is no denying the fact that sports are imbued with political meanings. From the financing of stadiums through public tax dollars... to the display and veneration of the flag, sports are inherently political. Therefore, to suggest that athletes cannot comment on – much less take action on – important issues of the day is an affront to the meaning of participatory democracy. How are athletes different from business people, doctors, and office workers?³

Much of my previous scholarship has dealt directly with the first problem, arguing that we cannot ignore the political significance of sport. My book, *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity*, for example, examines the role played by baseball in the (re)constitution of American national identity following 9/11. Elsewhere, I have addressed questions of political identity in terms of race, sexuality and religion.⁴ What unites these studies is not only the emphasis on sport as 'a constitutive site in which [socio-political] issues are communicated', but also the emphasis on viewing sport *rhetorically*.⁵ For those outside the discipline of rhetorical studies, the word 'rhetoric' is commonly defined in negative terms, akin to 'empty, bombastic words with no substance or trivial talk'.⁶ This is regrettable, for rhetoric, especially through its roots in ancient Athens and Rome, has much to tell us about politics in general, and citizenship in particular. Thus, my task in this essay is to use rhetoric as a theoretical lens through which we can better theorize a conception of citizenship in sport. I begin this essay with a brief overview of the rhetorical tradition, with particular attention to rhetoric's focus on democratic citizenship. Next, I turn to a conception of citizenship grounded in judgement, a rhetorical attitude that we may assign to the athletic arena. Finally, I consider a set of rhetorical exemplars, athletes who remind us that sport cannot be understood apart from the larger political context in which it operates.

Rhetoric, democracy and citizenship

Settling on a singular definition of rhetoric, especially in a culture that views the term with suspicion, is no easy task. Numerous variations have currency, but most rhetorical scholars return to classical definitions to ground contemporary theories. The most common point of origin is from Aristotle: '[Rhetoric] is the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion'.⁷ Nearly any contemporary definition is likely to preserve the emphasis on persuasion; however, there is an important distinction to be made. At the risk of being overly simplistic, rhetorical theorists generally occupy one of two schools of thought: (1) an *instrumental* school that views rhetoric as a tool of persuasion that addresses pre-established audiences or (2) a *constitutive* school that views rhetoric as a form of public address that invents audiences through its persuasive effect. From the former view, rhetoric is characterized by a speaker's effort to provide a 'fitting response' to an exigency that requires attention.⁸ From the latter view, rhetoric is less about a speaker's effort to address an audience through speech (though it may account for this) and more about ideological and mythic elements that enable any public to view itself as a collective audience.⁹

Although there are significant differences between these two schools, especially with respect to the role of ideology in rhetoric, they both emphasize the importance of *public* discourse and the interdependence between rhetoric and democracy.¹⁰ David Timmerman and Todd McDorman suggest that 'the relationship between the two [is] a necessary one, in the sense that democracy is impossible without the practice of public discourse and dialogue among citizens'.¹¹ If we take seriously the idea that democracy is a system of governance by the people, then public advocacy and deliberation must be understood as a central principle of citizenship. Because 'the rhetorical tradition has been all about civic

engagement', J. Michael Hogan insists that rhetorical scholars 'stress the responsibilities of citizenship' rather than reduce rhetorical practice merely to artful persuasion.¹² To do so allows us to recover the vocabulary of the ancient rhetorical tradition as a means to conceptualize contemporary citizenship.

Theories of citizenship may take many forms. Alessandra Beasley Von Burg suggests that one view is most common, however. As she explains:

Citizenship is usually thought of as synonymous with nationality and the rights and duties associated with the people who live, work, and participate politically, socially, and economically within the borders of their nation-state. In this conception, the main criterion used to decide who is and who is not a citizen is nationality.¹³

When citizenship is bound to national identity, enactments of citizenship are most commonly associated with the formal political institutions of the nation. Accordingly, the quintessential act of citizenship in Western democracies is voting. However, the mere act of voting is not sufficient to conclude that individuals are *engaged* in democracy in any meaningful way. As Robert Asen insists:

The act of voting exhibits a uniformity that is independent of the attitude of the individual voter. Yet it matters greatly in understanding the social significance of voting, whether voters regard their actions and the actions of others as a sham, a duty, or an expression of the voice of the people. Disposition and interpretation play important roles in the construction of social meanings. If we are to understand citizenship as a social endeavor, we ought to introduce these qualities into our conception.¹⁴

Asen seeks to reformulate our understanding of citizenship, therefore, by shifting our attention away from rights inherent to a democratic system to modes of public of engagement in a democracy. His 'discourse theory of citizenship' is built upon a rhetorical foundation that 'demonstrates clearly that advocacy – often, tireless, passionate advocacy – proceeds under conditions of imperfect knowledge'.¹⁵ It is important to note, then, that Asen emphasizes the *practice* of democratic citizenship over the *institutional* rights that attempt to categorize citizenship. From such a view, citizenship is about an engagement with other citizens, sometimes through formal structures such as community organizations or political elections, but just as importantly through affective, embodied rhetorical acts. It is here that Asen's theorizing has implications for the relationship between citizenship and sport, for the sporting context is a rich site of such embodiment. In their study of photo-journalism, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites conclude that citizenship is activated by the visual modes found in iconic photographs, such as the one of the teenager crying over the body of one of the slain students at Kent State University in 1970. Their conclusion that 'citizenship is transferable from one body to the other, not by legal entitlement or any contractual relationship, but through acts of empathy, affectional identification, and emotional expression on behalf of the other' is equally applicable to cases in the world of sport.¹⁶

Rhetoric, judgement and citizenship in sport

If it is safe to conclude that the rhetorical tradition provides a useful contemporary lens for viewing citizenship, then how might that foundation implicate our understanding of citizenship in sport? The answer to that question begins with an acknowledgment that rhetoric and sport have been intertwined from their moments of origin. As John Poulakos details, rhetoric emerged in ancient Greece alongside the development of competitive spectacles such as the Olympic Games. He adds that rhetoric was understood through an athletic metaphor because it was framed in agonistic terms. 'Normalized and internalized through the organization of the Olympic Games', he writes, 'this institutionalized form of

cultural activity shaped sophistic rhetoric in its image, *making public discourse a matter of competition*.¹⁷ More than competition for its own sake, *agonism* is a means of rhetorical engagement, one that is necessarily engaged with communal assembly. In her book, *Bodily Arts*, Debra Hawhee points out:

The Olympic Games, for example, depended on the gathering of athletes, judges, and spectators alike. *Agora*, the marketplace, shares the same derivative and a strikingly similar force of meaning as *agōn*, and, as is commonly known, functioned as the ancient gathering place par excellence.¹⁸

The mutual dependence of rhetoric and athletics reinvents what counts as public address, for the ‘focus on rhetoric’s connections to athletics enables a view of rhetoric as a bodily art rather than strictly a cerebral endeavor’.¹⁹

Hawhee’s study of ancient rhetoric and athletics provides a platform for conceptualizing contemporary sport’s ability to cultivate embodied modes of public engagement. Yet, before I identify exemplars of such engagement, I want to extend this conception of rhetorical practice by drawing on one more theorist of the sophistic tradition. Nola Heidlebaugh argues in *Judgment, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Incommensurability* that contemporary culture is characterized by incommensurability, not itself a problem as much as the fact that traditional modes of philosophical reasoning have ill-equipped us for negotiating among competing values, ideas and arguments. Given this, the question that drives her study is ‘In an age of diversity and pluralism, how can we talk productively about those issues that most divide us?’²⁰ As may be clear already, I want to suggest that sport may provide some answers to this question.

As Heidlebaugh notes, ‘The contemporary challenge to judgment seems to lie in our loss of faith in common standards and in agreements on what makes sense’. This tension is symbolized by what Thomas Kuhn terms the ‘incommensurability thesis’. Heidlebaugh finds this thesis limiting, however, because it ‘collapses linguistic understanding into visual’.²¹ This means that judgement follows from visibility, from being able to weigh and measure criteria against one another. In other words, it reduces judgement to spectatorship. In his book, *Political Judgment*, Ronald Beiner challenges the spectatorial observation that limits critical engagement. ‘Real judgment’, he argues, ‘is the expression of agency and autonomy, rather than being the product of passivity and mere convention’.²² Following this idea, Heidlebaugh invents a practice of judgement that is *active* – ‘characterized as the concentrated engagement we experience when we must act but there is no method dictating how’ – and *artistic* – ‘with an eye toward fashioning something new in the world’.²³

This conception of judgement returns us to the rhetorical tradition’s emphasis on public engagement and *agonism*. As Heidlebaugh notes, too often, incommensurability is seen as something to be feared or a problem to be eliminated. An *agonistic* approach, however, views incommensurability as an unavoidable and, in fact, productive means to managing political conflict. Democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe defines incommensurability in terms of the friend/enemy distinction, noting that any political system, even a democracy, will contain an ‘us’ and ‘them’. What is required, she insists, is that such divisions be understood in *agonistic* terms, wherein political opponents are viewed not as enemies but as adversaries, ‘persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way’.²⁴ This tension is valuable because it acknowledges conflict while still privileging identification, resulting in what Robert Ivie calls ‘consubstantial rivalry’.²⁵

Rivalry, of course, is a common part of sport’s lexicon. The term implies not only a present contest between opponents but also the promise of more contests in the future.

More importantly, the best rivalries are characterized by uncertainty. In other words, there is enough equity between sides that neither has a permanent advantage over the other. I want to be careful here, as there are important limits to the metaphor I am developing. Indeed, the passions inflamed by sporting rivalries have led to acts of violence – some between the contestants and others among fans and other observers – that feature antagonism over agonism.²⁶ Moreover, numerous commentators are all too eager to push the metaphor to its logical extreme by glorifying the apparent similarities between sport and war. Nevertheless, an ideal form of sport depends on mutual respect between opponents who are relatively evenly matched and on the willingness of those opponents to honour the rules of the game in which they are engaged. Although I fully recognize that contemporary sport may not fulfil these requirements consistently, it is nevertheless worth considering if this mythic ideal can yield a conception of citizenship that is grounded in sport.

Before making such a move, it is helpful to return to Heidlebaugh's argument, as she introduces two rhetorical constructs that shape her conception of active, artistic judgement. The first is *apatê*, defined by the sophist Gorgias as a 'trick' or 'deceit'. This is not to suggest that rhetorical judgement should be viewed as intentionally deceptive. Rather, it privileges the creative use of language as a way of exploiting ambiguity as opposed to eliminating it. In other words, it is not about the limits of rhetoric so much as it is about its possibilities. The second construct is *kairos*, or the art of acting well at the 'opportune moment'. This notion recognizes, therefore, that the presence of incommensurability shapes our action, and that 'meaning itself has to be reinvented in terms offered up by the moment'.²⁷ For Heidlebaugh, therefore, active, artistic judgement is a call to view citizenship as a creative process that is responsive to public concerns as they emerge and develop.

With this agonistic emphasis in mind, recall that Hawhee argues ancient athletic events were significant because they were *public*. In other words, spectacles such as the Olympics were imbued with rhetorical meaning because they featured embodied statements about virtue for audiences in a shared space of civic importance. From this view, theorizing sport rhetorically requires that we privilege the *constitutive* approach to rhetoric over the *instrumental* approach. As Maurice Charland suggests, constitutive rhetorics can call an audience into being by virtue of the ideological weight of discourse. Much like the 'imagined community' that Benedict Anderson theorizes as the essence of nationhood, through constitutive rhetoric, 'Political identity must be an ideological fiction'.²⁸ Yet if the ideological effect of discourse is to constitute a political identity, this does not mean such an identity is an illusion. Rather, it suggests that any 'people' (also read as 'public' or 'audience') are bound together by the shared myths disseminated to them through rhetorical means.²⁹ All of this is to say that by virtue of sport's ability to fashion collective mythologies, it is an ideal arena from which to consider active, artistic judgement as a form of citizenship.

The athlete as citizen

Although scholars from communication, cultural studies, sociology and elsewhere have attended in multiple ways to sport's political dimensions, there has not been – as this special issue suggests – a great deal of scholarship about sport and citizenship. The work that has been published tends to reflect the conclusion noted earlier by Beasley Von Burg – that citizenship is tied most obviously to national identity. For example, Dean Garrett's essay about 'sporting citizenship' assesses state efforts in the UK to cultivate 'Britishness' through sport. Similarly, Eley and Kirk, also writing about the UK, define citizenship primarily through community service and volunteerism. Meanwhile, in Michael Giardino's

theorization of ‘flexible citizenship’ as exemplified by tennis star Martina Hingis, citizenship is understood in relation to ‘celebrity identity across (trans)national boundaries’.³⁰

I do not mention these essays in any effort to critique them; rather, I wish to point out that articulating citizenship as a rhetorical practice grounded in political engagement has been under-theorized by those who study sport. Sport scholars have, of course, identified athletes who have embraced their roles as citizens, from studies of Muhammad Ali to Tommie Smith and John Carlos to Pat Tillman. These historical exemplars are, in many ways, consistent with the rhetorical principles I have outlined in the previous section. However, I would like to consider some less dramatic, yet nevertheless significant, contemporary moments of sporting citizenship, for two reasons. First, the aforementioned cases are well established, both through popular narratives and scholarly critiques. Second, and more importantly for my purposes here, I would like to focus on the range of actions that might embody Asen’s emphasis on modes of public engagement and Heidlebaugh’s conception of active, artistic judgement. Although Ali, Smith and Carlos, and Tillman represent compelling models for our consideration, they are also dramatic symbols that far exceed the typical boundaries of sport. To formulate a clearer conception of the athlete as citizen, it is prudent to ground the discussion in examples that, although still in the public arena of sport, are more accessible and commonplace. With this in mind, I turn to three athletes in particular: tennis player Andy Roddick, who boycotted a 2009 tournament in Dubai after government officials denied a visa to Israeli player Shahar Peer; National Football League (NFL) player Scott Fujita, whose activism on behalf of gay rights received considerable media attention during the 2010 season and the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) Phoenix Suns, whose owner and players together responded to Arizona’s controversial immigration legislation in 2010.

Andy Roddick

Following an era of American dominance, during which Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi, Jim Courier and Michael Chang won 27 Grand Slam tennis titles between them, Andy Roddick spent the majority of the 2000s as the number one male tennis player in the USA. Gifted with an enormous serve and forehand combination, by the turn of the twenty-first century most analysts expected Roddick to win multiple Grand Slam titles. He did win the 2003 U.S. Open, claiming the world’s number one ranking in the process. For many observers, he fell short of the enormous, and probably unreasonable, expectations originally placed on his shoulders, however. Limited by a backhand that took too long to fortify and given the misfortune of reaching his prime at the same time as his chief rival, Roger Federer, Roddick has reached another four Grand Slam finals, losing each championship to Federer. Despite these disappointments, he retired in 2012 with 32 career singles titles and finished among the world’s top 10 players for nine consecutive years (2002–2010).

Throughout his career and beyond, Roddick has been popular with both fans and sports media. Part of this is a product of his on-court success, but it is also because he has a reputation for being bright and entertaining in interviews and press conferences. Thus, much of his image is based on having an outgoing, friendly and often funny personality. Consistent with most of his contemporaries, Roddick’s image has been shaped through the advertising campaigns developed by the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) and his own sponsors, such as American Express. Also consistent with his peers, his image has largely been insulated from politics or controversies that are not about his sport. In this respect, Roddick would seem to embody the contemporary sporting celebrity who is

defined primarily by 'neo-liberal democracy and consumer capitalism'.³¹ Such a sporting celebrity is most certainly *not* defined in terms of citizenship.

Roddick's celebrity image articulates nicely with contemporary professional tennis, a sport which is both decidedly international and awash in capitalistic excess. No tournament better reflects this dual identity than the Dubai Tennis Championships, held on consecutive weeks by the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) and the ATP each February. Dubai is a city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), bordering the Persian Gulf. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, Dubai became a representative neo-liberal city with an economy driven by the oil industry and tourism.³² The annual tennis tournaments have been marketed as spectacles of consumption to fans and players alike. And tennis plays a role in an especially representative moment of excess, when, in 2005, the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai converted its helipad into a tennis court so that superstars Andre Agassi and Roger Federer could play an exhibition match hundreds of feet above the ground.

It is also significant to note that the emergence of Dubai as a top-tier destination on the professional tennis tours occurred during the first decade of the twenty-first century, a period that overlaps with the American-led 'war on terror' that many critics have suggested offered the USA an excuse to pursue policies based on oil and the pursuit of under-exploited economic markets in the Middle East. Although Arab populations were targeted by American military efforts, especially in Iraq, the UAE government expressed no reservations about the presence of American tennis players for the ATP and WTA events. However, in the wake of Israeli military strikes in late 2008 and early 2009 against the Gaza Strip, largely populated by Arabs of Palestinian identity, the UAE denied a visa to Israeli player Shahar Peer in February 2009.³³ According to tournament director Salah Talak, the decision was motivated by concerns that Peer could be a target of retribution. As he stated,

We do not wish to politicize sports, but we have to be sensitive to recent events in the region and not alienate or put at risk the players and the many tennis fans of different nationalities that we have here in the UAE.³⁴

Despite the stated reason for the denial, most observers concluded that UAE officials prevented her from playing in the tournament to exact some political retribution. Sports media, WTA officials and many players were extremely critical of the decision. The Tennis Channel refused to broadcast the tournament and the WTA levied a \$300,000 fine against the organizers. As Larry Scott, CEO of the WTA, said,

I think what we hope with this decision is that we're sending a very clear message that we're not going to tolerate discrimination of any kind. We wanted to send a clear signal that this is the most egregious action the world of tennis has seen in recent history. And we felt that it should be at least double what the previous highest penalty was'.³⁵

Yet, despite the criticisms, the players agreed to play and the event proceeded as scheduled. In words that spoke volumes about the synergies between professional tennis and capital accumulation, American player Venus Williams concluded,

There are so many other people involved. Sponsors are important to us. We wouldn't be here without sponsors. We can't let sponsors down. Whatever we do, we need to do as a team – players, sponsors, tour, and whoever – and not all break off in one direction. We are team players.³⁶

To her credit, after winning the tournament, Williams did address the crowd in Dubai, stating,

I thought it was brave of [Peer] to come here and try and play despite knowing that it is not going to be easy for her.... I am not here to rock any boat or upset people, I am just here to do things that are right. And I think right things are already happening next week and right things will happen next year.³⁷

Once the WTA event commenced, speculation turned to whether or not the UAE would approve a visa for Israeli player Andy Ram, who was scheduled to play in the men's tournament the subsequent week. In the light of the criticism officials received for their decision on Peer, it is not surprising that Ram was granted the visa. This appeared to resolve the situation for many, including Williams, who concluded, 'Obviously, Andy Ram got his visa, so I'll be happy to come and defend next year'.³⁸ Meanwhile, 2008 champion Andy Roddick assessed the situation differently. Even after Ram was permitted entry to Dubai, Roddick declared that he would not defend his title. He explained:

I really didn't agree with what went on over there. I don't know if it's the best thing to mix politics and sport, and that was probably a big part of it.... It's just disappointing that reflects on a tournament that probably didn't have much to do with the decision. Nevertheless, I just don't feel like there's a need for that in a sporting event. I don't think you make political statements through sports.³⁹

Roddick's boycott did not receive that much attention in American sports media, but those who noticed praised his courage. Gwen Knapp wrote, 'Skipping the tournament probably should have been an automatic choice for more players rather than a bold, singular act, worthy of high praise. But given the ethical climate we inhabit these days, Roddick's choice stands out'. Jon Wertheim added, 'For all the hand-wringing and "on the one hand; on the other hand" equivocating, Roddick stood tallest'. And Lisa Olson concluded most emphatically, 'That Roddick chose to boycott the tournament he won last year says everything you need to know about his class, his cojones'.⁴⁰

If we recall Beiner's comments about judgement, his concern is that too often citizens are content to play the role of the spectator, acting passively or relying on 'mere convention'. Convention on the professional tennis circuit is certainly to pay homage to 'the sponsors' and await word from organizational leaders when controversy arises. This is reflected in the comments from Venus Williams, who appeared content to allow the WTA to render any judgement in the matter about Shahar Peer. Roddick, by contrast, exercised a much more *active* form of judgement. In particular, he demonstrated *kairos* by acting decisively at an 'opportune moment'. Even after Andy Ram was granted a visa, Roddick nevertheless spotlighted his disappointment about the Peer decision. Although the top two ranked players (at the time), Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, also withdrew from the tournament, they cited injuries for their inability to play and said nothing about the political controversy. Roddick, meanwhile, addressed the issue openly and directly, exercising clear judgement about the intrusion of state politics at the Dubai tournament.

Scott Fujita

In its 12 March 2012 issue, *Sports Illustrated* reported that as many as 27 members of the New Orleans Saints defense participated in a 'bounty' programme organized by Defensive Coordinator Greg Williams. Under the programme, players were rewarded in cash – in one reported case, as much as \$10,000 – for big hits that resulted in injuries to opposing players.⁴¹ The report prompted significant controversy, as sports media attempted to identify the fine line between 'tough' and 'dirty' in American football. What makes that line so blurry is that football is upheld in the USA as *the* standard bearer of masculinity in sport. Observers expect the game to be violent and, at times, to result in significant injuries. Spectacular collisions and big hits generate excitement among fans and provide tests of courage for players. Pittsburgh Steelers safety Troy Polamalu, one of the biggest defensive stars in the NFL, goes so far as to say that 'overcoming that fear [of a big hit] is what makes us men'.⁴²

Sport scholars have long acknowledged that intimidation and toughness are hallmarks of *hegemonic masculinity*, what R.W. Connell calls ‘the culturally idealized form of masculine character’.⁴³ From this perspective, the Saints scheme to reward players for big hits is a logical extension of the normalized violence that characterizes professional football. One of the peculiar dimensions to this story, however, is that it implicated one player who has otherwise called into question football’s typical characteristics of masculinity. Scott Fujita, who played for New Orleans from 2006 to 2009, was named by *Sports Illustrated* as a contributor to the Saints’ bounty pool. As Peter King points out, what makes this surprising is that Fujita is a member of the NFL Players Association’s executive board, in which he has made issues of player safety a priority. For the record, Fujita insists that any money he ever contributed was given directly to players for important plays and not to any pool designed to reward intentionally causing an injury to an opponent.

What is the source, then, of the apparent dissonance between Scott Fujita’s image and his possible participation in such unseemly behaviour? Put another way, why is this particular player important to a discussion about citizenship among athletes? Scott Fujita is not like most professional football players, if only by virtue of the fact that he chooses to express opinions about matters unrelated to the game. It is crucial, of course, to distinguish between the simple expression of an opinion – informed or otherwise – and the meaningful engagement with political and social concerns. Fujita’s track record appears consonant with the latter, as sports media have acknowledged him as a rare player who regularly introduces political discussions in the locker room. Fully embracing the liberal persona associated with being a graduate of the University of California, Fujita states, ‘There is a certain stigma that comes with being from Berkeley. And I’m proud of that stigma’.⁴⁴

If Fujita is best known for being outspoken about any subject in particular, it is equality for the gay and lesbian community. Precisely because football is assumed to be a safe house for hegemonic masculinity, Fujita’s open support for same sex marriage and adoption is, indeed, newsworthy. He is not alone, either, as Brendon Ayanbodejo made news in 2009 when he wrote an opinion piece for the *Huffington Post* defending same sex marriage.⁴⁵ Yet, up until 2012, it was Fujita who has received the majority of attention on this issue, including in interviews with gay and lesbian themed (LGBT) oriented publications *The Advocate* and *OutSports.com*.⁴⁶ Perhaps most notably, he publicly endorsed the National Equality March for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in October, 2009. In an interview with progressive sports journalist Dave Zirin, Fujita commented,

By in [sic] large in this country the issue of gay rights and equality should be past the point of debate. Really, there should be no debate anymore. For me, in my small platform as a professional football player, I understand that my time in the spotlight is probably limited. The more times you have to lend your name to a cause you believe in, you should do that.⁴⁷

Fujita’s recognition that he has a platform to be an advocate is dependent on his willingness to address a public. In this respect, he is more explicitly *rhetorical* in his advocacy than Andy Roddick. Moreover, his words are directed not at a single moment of injustice but to a larger cultural formation that perpetuates injustice. Thus, Fujita’s judgement not only is active, it is also artistic, for it is rendered ‘with an eye toward fashioning something new in the world’. It is important to note, too, that his language choices recall Heidelebaugh’s emphasis on *apatê*, the creative use of language to open up new possibilities based on judgement. Fujita recognizes that issues such as same sex

marriage are likely to spark controversy and make some teammates uncomfortable, especially in the context of the locker room. Yet, it is within the space of the locker room that he addresses these concerns, even as his coaches have discouraged him from doing so. In his words:

I try to pose the argument in a way that isn't confrontational. I don't want to bring hate into it. I center it on love and understanding and common sense. And I think people hear my message and the way I bring my story into it, I think more often than not people understand the commonsense of it. They just have to wrap their head around the idea that love is love.⁴⁸

Fujita concludes that his willingness to make such arguments, combined with his teammates' willingness to listen, actually contributed to the cohesion that characterized the Saints' Super Bowl winning season. In this way, his words are deceptive, not because they cannot be trusted, but because they engage political issues in terms that change the normally confrontational nature of the debate. As a result, Fujita not only demonstrates *apatê*, he also enacts his citizenship in agonistic terms.

It is important, too, to acknowledge the potential constitutive effect of Fujita's judgement. I do not mean to suggest that he has, by himself, constituted an audience of football-playing LGBT advocates. However, he certainly deserves some credit for helping to shift the nature of the conversation in professional sports. Although he acknowledges that homophobic language persists within the locker room, he also suggests that 'guys are a lot more tolerant than they get credit for but they're not comfortable yet speaking out about it. It's going to come in time. By in [sic] large, it's an opinion that's shared by more people than are realized. I just wish it was shared by everybody.'⁴⁹ In the months subsequent to his support for the National Equality March, other noteworthy developments suggest a constitutive effect. Among the most notable public comments came from former NFL wide receiver, Michael Irvin, a player long associated with hegemonic masculinity's norms. In a story for *Out* magazine, which includes a half-dressed Irvin on the cover, he explains that his excessive antics were a product of over-compensating for anxieties prompted by the discovery that his older brother was gay. Confessing that it took him a long time to accept his brother's sexuality, Irvin explicitly offers his support to any gay athletes who may wish to come out publicly and links the issue to racial discrimination. In his words,

No one should be telling you who you should love, no one should be telling you who you should be spending the rest of your life with. When we start talking about equality, and everybody being treated equally, I don't want to know an African-American who will say everybody doesn't deserve equality.⁵⁰

Irvin's appearance in *Out* corresponds with the Human Rights Campaign's video series, Americans for Marriage Equality. In 2011, Scott Fujita appeared in a video, as did fellow NFL (retired) player Michael Strahan, NBA star Steve Nash, and, in perhaps the most surprising appearance, NHL 'enforcer' Sean Avery.⁵¹ Much as the advocacy of Fujita, Irvin and Strahan holds the promise of challenging hegemonic masculinity in football, so too does Avery's judgement disrupt the norms found in hockey. It is also a reminder, however, that exercising citizenship through active, artistic judgement is not without risk. Shortly after appearing in the video, Avery was called a homophobic slur by one of his opponents, Wayne Simmonds.⁵² It is important to emphasize, then, that citizenship as a mode of engagement is not an expression of a perfectly realized institutional right but it is a *process*, a means of refashioning our democracy 'as a contingent human creation carried out through communication'.⁵³

Los Suns

If Sean Avery's appearance in the Americans for Marriage Equality may have been a surprise, then surely Steve Nash's was not. Nash is a two-time NBA's most valuable player winner and one of the most celebrated point guards in recent professional basketball history. He is also known for his philanthropic work and his commentary about various political issues, including clear opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq. During the NBA's All-Star Weekend in February, 2003, for example, Nash appeared before the media wearing a t-shirt that read, 'No War: Shoot for Peace'. His anti-war stance may have been complicated for some observers by his nationality: Nash was born in Johannesburg, South Africa and raised in Canada. Having now played collegiate and professional basketball in the USA for close to two decades, he might well embody the kind of 'flexible citizenship' Giardina assigns to Martina Hingis. This multinational identity also figures into Nash's reaction to the controversial immigration bill signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer on 23 April 2010.

The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, better known as SB 1070, is legislation designed to curtail illegal immigration in Arizona. The bill sparked significant controversy across the country, primarily because of the new law's provision to allow law enforcement to question individuals under a 'reasonable suspicion' clause. Critics suggested that SB 1070 would facilitate racial profiling, using fear of illegal immigrants to justify discrimination against the state's large Latino community. Many within the world of sports reacted to the bill, including the owner of the NBA's Phoenix Suns, Robert Sarver. When the Suns hosted the San Antonio Spurs for a play-off game on 5 May 2010 – Cinco de Mayo – Sarver announced that the team would wear alternate jerseys that featured 'Los Suns' instead of simply 'Suns'. Although the decision was partly designed to celebrate the holiday, it was also done explicitly in response to SB 1070. As Sarver said,

However intended, the result of passing this law is that our basic principles of equal rights and protection under the law are being called into question, and Arizona's already struggling economy will suffer even further setbacks at a time when the state can ill-afford them.⁵⁴

Members of the Phoenix Suns were supportive of Sarver's decision, even those players who rarely speak about politics. For instance, Amare Stoudemire said, 'It's going to be great to wear Los Suns to let the Latin community know that we're behind them 100 percent'.⁵⁵ But it was Nash who, unsurprisingly, was the more public advocate. Appearing on the ESPN programme *Pardon the Interruption*, Nash grounded his comments in his own cultural background, stating,

This league is very multicultural. We have players from all over the world, myself obviously being a foreigner and many of my teammates, players on the other teams, our communities are very multicultural so I think we have to find a different way to combat the issues that we face in our society. And I think that [SB 1070] is the wrong way to go about it.⁵⁶

Nash emphasized this perspective in other interviews and, in doing so, his rhetorical choices echoed some of those made by Scott Fujita. For example, he offered the following justification for his team's use of the Los Suns jerseys:

I'm proud of our owner for taking a stand, but we're not out there to alienate, we want this to be all about loving our community and people regardless of whether they agree with us or myself, or not. We have love for everybody, and we'd just like to get to a consensus that everyone can live with, and that isn't an infringement, or a possible infringement, on human rights.⁵⁷

Much like Fujita, Nash's words suggest a willingness to respect differences of opinion and to work towards agonistic resolutions to conflict. They also embrace the sense of risk that Asen maintains is characteristic of public engagement. As he notes, 'Opening oneself up to risk intimates a willingness to change one's mind'.⁵⁸ Nash's comments above are contextualized further by his acknowledgement that 'the bill is continually changing, and it seems that it will continue to change. So it's impossible to have a stance that is black and white and all or nothing, because it's going to continue to change.'⁵⁹ Thus, he demonstrates that citizenship can be enacted through modes of public engagement that invite, rather than close off, further discussion about controversial issues.

Nash, in concert with his teammates, also shares with Andy Roddick a sense of *kairos*. Sarver's decision to wear the Los Suns jerseys as an overt statement against SB 1070 arose at an opportune moment, as the spotlight already shining on the state of Arizona was intensified by the atmosphere of an NBA play-off game that featured the hometown Suns and another team, the Spurs, that represented an area with a large Latino population. What made Sarver's statement especially effective was his avoidance of typical organizational speak in favour of a direct engagement with the SB 1070 controversy. This unequivocal advocacy from Sarver and Nash facilitated a surprisingly robust political discussion within the sporting context. Indeed, Turner Network Television's pre-game coverage of the May 5 game included footage of Rev. Al Sharpton's march through Phoenix, organized in opposition to the bill, as well as a refreshingly civil and intelligent conversation about the immigration issue between studio hosts Ernie Johnson, Charles Barkley and Kenny Smith.

By contrast, other athletes were less committed to their initial criticisms of the law. The most notable example is baseball player Adrian Gonzalez, who in 2010 was a member of the San Diego Padres. As someone who grew up between Tijuana and southern California, Gonzalez well understood the cultural and political implications of SB 1070. When the bill was first signed, Gonzalez responded, 'I'll support the Players Association 100%. If they leave it up to the players and the law is still there, I'll probably not play in the All-Star Game. Because it's a discriminating law.'⁶⁰ Elsewhere, he added, 'It's immoral. They're violating human rights. In a way, it goes against what this country was built on. This is discrimination.'⁶¹ The promise of a boycott echoed the words of others who suggested that Major League Baseball, in which more than a quarter of rosters comprise Latin American players, should move its already scheduled 2011 All-Star Game out of Phoenix.

Although protestors did organize anti-SB 1070 events in response to the 2011 game, it nevertheless proceeded as planned. Among those who played in the game was none other than Adrian Gonzalez, who in 2011 was in his first season with the Boston Red Sox. He justified his retraction by indicating that he had simply intended to follow the lead of the MLB Players Association, and since the most controversial language in the law had been modified, 'the urgency for action has waned'.⁶² It may not be fair to find fault with Gonzalez's softened resistance to SB 1070, but it is fair to point out that publicly engaged citizenship must be responsive to the constraints of time. Although the Phoenix Suns responded in the moment of urgency, Gonzalez deferred any judgement until a later time, whereupon there was far less need for him to take any particular action. It is, therefore, a reminder that active, artistic judgement requires that citizens take seriously the need to act well at the opportune moment.

Constituting the athlete as citizen

Each of these athletes is worthy of our attention as sport scholars because they embody a conception of citizenship that is active, engaged and constitutive. They share a recognition that there are times when, as athletes, it is important to acknowledge, or even resist, the political associations that are commonly featured in sport. Moreover, these cases are reminders that the specific sporting contexts make possible the kind of judgement required of engaged citizenship. Andy Roddick plays on one of the most international circuits in all of sport. The very nature of tennis, which requires substantial travel and interaction with players from all over the world, provides a context in which the exclusion of Shahar Peer is clearly seen as discriminatory. Scott Fujita, meanwhile, plays one of the most violent positions in one of the most violent of sports. The physicality of football often reinforces strict codes of masculinity, something seen as threatened by any identity not understood as heterosexual. Accordingly, Fujita's open support of the LGBT community is intensified because it stands in such contrast to football's cultural norms. In the case of Steve Nash, his multinational identity grants him a perspective that contributes to his arguments about valuing diversity and cultural pluralism in a state with a significant minority population. Indeed, the Phoenix Suns organization as a whole responded to the passage of SB 1070 by positively identifying with the various identities that constitute the local community.

It is worth addressing at this stage something that these athletes have in common: they are all expressing their citizenship in terms that articulate with 'progressive' causes (Roddick's actions may be more ambiguous). This presents something of a dilemma, as I do not believe there is any inherent reason that 'conservative' causes could not be promoted through active, artistic judgement. Perhaps the most applicable example would be former baseball pitcher Curt Schilling, who has consistently supported Republican political candidates and is never afraid of voicing his opinion. Simply supporting a candidate or expressing an opinion falls short of engaged citizenship, however. And more common are athletes such as baseball outfielder Luke Scott, whose doubts about President Obama's nation of birth are representative of the unformed expressions of opinion that are all too common in American political culture.⁶³ Part of the issue is that professional athletes are largely expected to think passively, as a part of a team that overrides any individual convictions. As Jim Bouton, the former pitcher whose book, *Ball Four*, sparked controversy when it was published in 1970 because it dared to share the secrets of the major league locker room, puts it, 'Athletes are basically conservative people who succeeded by being team players.... Too many players, especially in my day, were marginally educated, socially unsophisticated, and economically naive.'⁶⁴

Although I worry that Bouton's description unfairly reproduces the 'dumb jock' stereotype so often levelled against professional athletes, he does identify why it may be difficult to be an engaged citizen within sport culture. Fortunately, as the examples of Roddick, Fujita and Nash suggest, *difficult* does not mean *impossible*. Indeed, given its role in public culture and the myriad ways it intersects with politics, sport can be an ideal site to foster engaged citizenship and critical judgement. Moreover, the degree of identification often found between athletes and fans endows the enactments of citizenship by athletes with the promise of constituting new and better ways of imagining democratic life. Put simply, sport is political; athletes should be allowed to be political as well.

Notes

1. Pearlman, 'Pro Athletes'.
2. Zirin, 'Shut Up and Play'.
3. Kaufman and Wolff, 'Playing and Protesting'.

4. Butterworth, *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity*; Butterworth, 'Race in "The Race"'; Butterworth, 'Pitchers and Catchers'; Michael L. Butterworth, 'Saved at Home'.
5. Butterworth, 'Saved at Home', 326.
6. Foss et al., 'An Introduction to Rhetoric'.
7. In Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*.
8. Bitzer, 'The Rhetorical Situation'.
9. Charland, 'Constitutive Rhetoric'.
10. For more on the public nature of rhetoric, see Lucaites and Condit, 'Introduction'.
11. Timmerman and McDorman, 'Introduction'.
12. Hogan, 'Rhetorical Pedagogy and Democratic Citizenship'.
13. Von Burg, 'Caught Between History and Imagination'.
14. Asen, 'A Discourse Theory of Citizenship'.
15. Ibid., 200.
16. Hariman and Lucaites, 'Dissent and Emotional Management'.
17. Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric*, emphasis mine.
18. Hawhee, *Bodily Arts*.
19. Ibid., 14.
20. Heidlebaugh, *Judgment, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Incommensurability*.
21. Ibid., 10, 12.
22. Beiner, *Political Judgment*.
23. Heidlebaugh, *Judgment, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Incommensurability*, 25, 26.
24. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.
25. Ivie, *Democracy and America's War on Terror*.
26. Grano, 'Ritual Disorder'.
27. Heidlebaugh, *Judgment, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Incommensurability*, 40, 43, 45.
28. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Charland, 'Constitutive Rhetoric', 137.
29. McGee, 'In Search of "The People"'.
30. Garratt, 'Sporting Citizenship'; Eley and Kirk, 'Developing Citizenship Through Sport'; Giardina, 'Global Hingis'.
31. Andrews and Jackson, 'Introduction'.
32. Kanna, 'Flexible Citizenship in Dubai'.
33. A visa is not typically required for tennis players. However, because Israel and the UAE do not have formal diplomatic relations, a visa is required for Israeli players to enter the Dubai tournament.
34. 'Tennis Channel Cancels Dubai Coverage', *ESPN.com*, <http://sports.espn.go.com/sports/tennis/news/story?id=39129> (accessed February 17, 2009).
35. 'WTA Fines Dubai; Roddick Withdraws', *ESPN.com*, <http://sports.espn.go.com/sports/tennis/news/story?id=3922734> (accessed February 20, 2009).
36. 'Venus Rules Out Boycott over Peer', *BBC Sport*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/tennis/7897265.stm> (accessed February 18, 2009).
37. Olson, 'Even on Spirited Court'.
38. Ibid.
39. 'WTA Fines Dubai; Roddick Withdraws', *ESPN.com*, <http://sports.espn.go.com/sports/tennis/news/story?id=3922734> (accessed February 20, 2009).
40. Knapp, 'Roddick Protest Worthy of Praise'; Wertheim, 'The Peer-Dubai Fallout Rages On'; Olson, 'Even on Spirited Court'.
41. King, 'Way Out of Bounds'.
42. Layden, 'Intimidation Rules'.
43. Connell, 'An Iron Man'.
44. LaPointe, 'The Saints Linebacker who Speaks his Mind'.
45. Ayanbedejo, 'Same Sex Marriages'.
46. Bolcer, 'Scott Fujita Plays'; Zeigler, 'Scott Fujita Blazing Gay-Friendly Trail in NFL'.
47. Zirin, 'Why I Support'.
48. Zeigler, 'Scott Fujita Blazing Gay-Friendly Trail in NFL'.
49. Zirin, 'Why I Support'.
50. Zeigler, 'Michael Irvin'.
51. Bolcer, 'Scott Fujita Plays'.

52. **Strang**, 'Sean Avery Called Homophobic Slur'. Given the connection Irvin makes between racial discrimination and the discrimination of the LGBT community, it is a bitter irony that Simmonds is black and had been the target of a racially motivated incident, when a fan threw a banana on the ice Simmonds' direction, only a week before his exchange with Avery.
53. Asen, 'A Discourse Theory of Citizenship', 198.
54. **Adande**, 'Suns Using Jerseys to Send Message'.
55. 'Los Suns' Jerseys Set for Cinco de Mayo', *ESPN.com*, <http://sports.espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2010/news/story?id=5162380> (accessed May 4, 2010).
56. 'Arizona Law: Steve Nash Speaks Out on ESPN's Pardon the Interruption', *Orlando Sentinel*, <http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/sports-sentinel-sports-now/2010/05/05/arizona-law-steve-nash-speaks-out-on-espns-pardon-the-interruption/> (accessed May 5, 2010).
57. **Pollakoff**, 'Steve Nash Discusses SB 1070 after Suns'.
58. Asen, 'A Discourse Theory of Citizenship', 200.
59. **Pollakoff**, 'Steve Nash Discusses SB 1070 after Suns'.
60. **Koster**, 'Adrian Gonzalez Speaks Out against Arizona Immigration Law'.
61. **Zirin**, 'Adrian Gonzalez'.
62. *Ibid.*
63. For more on Scott, see **Brown**, 'Answer Man'.
64. **Bouton**, 'Foreward'.

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