

On the use and abuse of sport for life.

Some recent comments have made me think I ought to clarify what I've said about sport. My having said that I hate sport is in no way intended to imply that people who enjoy sport (or at least like watching it) are in some way doing something wrong. They're not. They are enjoying what they like, and that's what a free country is all about. I'm no totalitarian, and do not want to dictate to others what they should and shouldn't enjoy. My problem arises only when sport lovers take themselves to be the whole – when they assume that everybody shares their love of sport.

This assumption is made unthinkingly by the media when it includes sport in the news. “The news” is by definition what *everybody* needs to know, and its proper topic is that which concerns everyone. Things like the weather, the economy, major disasters, government decisions and elections, serious crimes, issues with public transport or roads. That's why we don't have, say, a cookery segment, or a woodwork segment, or a segment on gardening on the news. These are specific interests, and specific shows are devoted to them, so that interested individuals can choose to watch them, and others choose not to, thereby increasing freedom for both parties. Very democratic.

But not so for sport. For some reason, sport is assumed to be of interest to everybody, when this is just not so. The massive numbers who attend sporting events are still much smaller than the even more massive number of people who don't. Who won what games is simply not something that everybody actually needs to know. It is something that those people who choose to be interested need to know. What is actually going on in the world – this is what everybody needs to know. Exactly how much radiation is still leaking out of Fukushima into the Pacific Ocean? How is it spreading and what effect is this having? What effect is the mega-litres of contaminated water which has been leaking from the Ranger uranium mine in Kakadu National Park actually having on actual reality? But there is no air-time to spend reporting these things. Instead, we have to have ten minutes of sport.

This is the exact nature of my beef. It is not sport, but how it is being used as a tool of distraction. Old-time sport enthusiasts might even agree with me here, the ones who still believe that it really is how you play the game, and not whether you win or lose, which was actually supposed to be the whole point of sport. But they're as endangered as spotted quolls, powerful owls and wedge-tailed eagles. Not that anyone in Australia would have any idea what these animals even are, from watching the news. Our collective destruction of these creatures is not something we want to know about, although in reality, we are doing it. This is serious head-in-the-sand behaviour, which it turns out ostriches don't actually do. Just humans, en masse.

“So what” I hear the hard-nosed say. Extinct species might be a bit sad, but it doesn't really matter. But stop and entertain this thought. Just ten thousand years ago, there were no dogs. Just wolves. In ten thousand years of domestication, mankind's selective breeding has unfolded all that amazing diversity which we call “dogs” out of wolves. Now if our ancestors had wiped out all the wolves, we would never have known the amazing possibilities of dog-breeding. Who knows what untapped potential each and every species of animal could represent to humans who are able to be smart about their future? No-one can say what unimaginable possibilities we might discover. But anyone can see that all those possibilities are brought to nothing if that species goes extinct. Whatever it had to teach us about life itself is thereby destroyed, whatever doors of possibility it opens are forever closed, not only for ourselves, but for all future generations of our descendants.

This is why endangered species are things that everyone needs to know about. Have sport shows for those who choose to be interested. But get sport out of the news, and turn instead to reality, to what is actually going on in the world, to the environment, which, like a storm or a flood, involves everyone it affects, whether they want to be interested or not.