

Book Review

The Ethics of Sports Fandom
By Adam Kadlac.

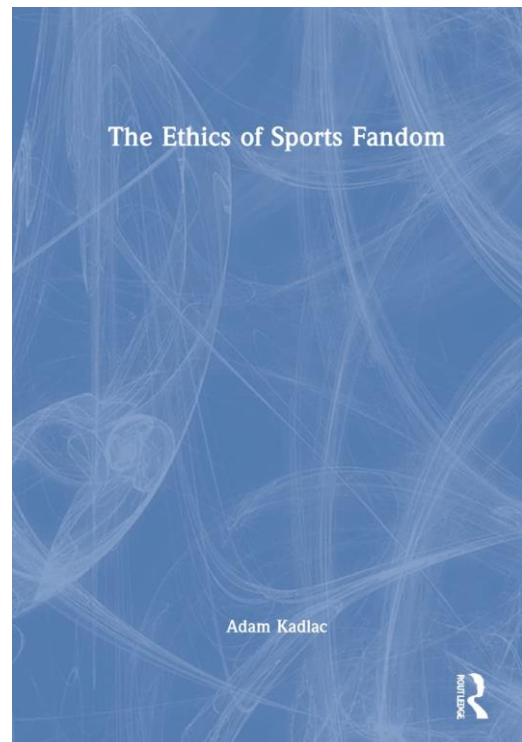
A Review By
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Title: The Ethics of Sports Fandom
Series: -
Author: Adam Kadlac
Publisher: Routledge
Year: 2022
No. of pages: 145 pages
ISBN: 9781032120195 Hardcover \$156.85.

Front Cover

Source: < <https://images.routledge.com/common/jackets/amazon/978103212/9781032120195.jpg> >



In the academic field of philosophy of sport, some topics address the relationship of ethical issues in sports. Most of those topics mentioning the ethical pursuit of sports-related issues, for example, issues of fair sport, the absence of drug or doping by athletes, the refusal of racist discrimination in the conduct of sporting events, etc., are considered current issues and debates by the academics. However, the ethical issue of being sports fans remains to be seen as yet to be discussed. It is also unclear what it would look like to address what could be called the ethics of sports fandom. Eventually, the vagueness of this point is alleviated by the current book studied and described by Adam Kadlac. From my first impression, only the title of this present book from Kadlac can stimulate my curiosity about the originality of issues like this in the philosophy of sport.

Kadlac explains in the book's introduction that the main reason for inducing his writing on the importance of sport and fandom is the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has brought about the cancellation of sports seasons and, of course, the prohibition of fans' participation in those sports events. What has happened is the impact that many athletes encountered obstacles to progress in their professional sports, and sports fans felt

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a lack of significance in the lives they had previously fulfilled. The vibe of the sort of significance is called by Kadlac “the allure of escapism” which is to emphasize the aspect of sports fans’ fantasies of fulfilling their meaningful lives with enjoyment and excitement (*pp. 1-6*). The primary point that Kadlac points out to us is the importance of the pronoun “We” that sports fans have used when referring to their opinions on any aspect of the competition (*pp. 14-16*). For Kadlac, the use of the pronoun is considered “a kind of proxy for their broader commitments as sports fans” (*p. 16*). However, there are many ontological complexities for one to understand the use of the pronoun, and finally, the use can be considered dynamic (*pp. 17-20*). Next, Kadlac refers to academic studies on sports fans as spectators for him to argue that fandom is analogous to communality. Sports fans are to have the same feelings when they are watching the game, and this situation is rather similar to the people in a commune who are to aim at one final objective, altogether. They share the same traits of feelings along the way, and this can be considered one of the ways to make their lives meaningful (*pp. 30-43*).

Sports fans love their sports teams and fandoms in the meaningful way of familial love which can be explained that it is involved with the inclination of togetherness to survive with a sense of belonging in the family (*pp. 46-53*). However, there is a harmful risk of the overprofusion of love. Some athletes have been killed as a result of severe disappointment from sports fans disappointed by their defeat in the sport. They are “the pitfalls of objectification” in sports. Whenever athletes are not considered as full human beings, but they are viewed only in some parts of the lives of their performances by those who are watching them, then those athletes are being objectified. However, if sports fans are to consider the athletes as whole beings as when they consider the ordinary people, what is the point of special meaning to fulfill their lives as sports fans? Kadlac answers that only the pitfalls of objectification are the things that we should be careful about. Athletes are still human beings who can sometimes err. Athletes do not owe it to their fans to the point that they have to satisfy their fans by winning and doing great in every sporting game. Sports fans themselves, if they are unwilling to continue supporting their athletes for reasons of weak performances, can change their minds to be loyal to other teams (*pp. 61-75*). Moreover, it is socially inappropriate for sports fans to be misogynists when watching sports with female athletes. This is not egalitarian fandom (*pp. 95-109*). Again, it is inappropriate for sports fans to accept racial discrimination or political injustice. This is not cosmopolitan fandom (*pp. 114-126*).

From the entire content of this book, I think that there are two main points for Kadlac to spell out his view. The two main points are (1) sports fandom is to express the power of “We” for the fandom members to be fulfilled, and (2) sports fandom needs ethical requirements. However, in this review, I will analyze the two points together.

Being the “We” urged as an inspiration in sports fandom is described by Kadlac as a cue to bring about the meaning of life. The meaning of life in this aspect can also be considered as the whole meaning of a person’s life as an individual connected to the people of the sports fandom through having a predicate which is the name of the fandom. Therefore, it will come to state what status they have for them to be proud of. However, being meant as a connection between an individual and a collective sports fandom, how is this connection explained? It is the case that an individual has the power of will to associate himself or herself with his or her prestige as a part of that sports fandom, or is it the case that the high popularity composed out of an ever-growing chronological experience of the sports team is strong enough to influence the individual and also to cause that individual to be drawn into a sports fandom as he or she is unaware? If there is a question as to how important this question is to the composition of the “We,” it can be answered that it is important in the sense of knowing clearly what way the

pronoun “We” is when it is in the discourse that sports fans utter. We must not forget that the discourse formed by the pronoun “We” can come from both sides of a match, assuming Team A competes against Team B, and sports fans of each team use the pronoun “We” for their fandoms. There can be conversations such as fans of Team A said *‘We are going to beat you up, B!’* and fans of Team B replying *‘We are going to crush you, A!’* These indicate that the pronoun “We” can be obtained from each party, and can denote each with a different meaning. This distinction is well understood when each team of sports fans understands that they are united in their group and that any word or pronoun that is used is meaningful on its side. However, we must not forget that sporting events are for two or more teams to get into competitions. It is undeniable that the reputation of each team has to be a derivative thing stemmed out of how they fight and compete against one another, which further implies that the reputation of both Team A and Team B must be relied on cultivating reputations in the history of those teams’ tournaments. In other words, one sports team needs the other to get into competition for its victory to be meaningful, and for its popularity to be fulfilled. In this latter form, it is possible to consider in another way that each individual who has stepped into membership in a sports fandom is in some way attracted to the predicate of membership of that sports fandom that defines him or her. Those sports fans are not to completely exercise their wills of choosing their favorite sports team by themselves. This point which is about the problem of ontological status of the “We” is, in my opinion, still missing from Kadlac’s analysis.

Moreover, there are lots of differences when it gets to the consideration of individual action and collective action. Should it be understood that the constitutive being of the “We” is with its collective action? If, say, there is a situation of a group of Team-A fans attacking Team-B athletes, in what way should this wrongful action of Team-A fans be considered, individually or collectively? Should it be considered that all of the Team-A fans (including those who were not present in the situation) are responsible to take the moral blame for this? For one to be responsible for an action that is to be made a judgment of moral value, that one, to some extent, needs to be sufficiently understood whether the action is done individually or collectively (Miller, 2020: 38-39). However, from Kadlac’s point of view, it could be considered a wrongful objectification of athletes. In the situation, Team-A fans were with problematic behaviors (p. 92). Nevertheless, it is not yet considered whether the wrong action is committed individually or collectively, and it is not yet clear what consideration of punishment should be. However, from the point of view of the other article on this same trait of problem, it is suggested those fans abandon their fandoms. It is inappropriate for sports fans to cause any violence with the reason of love for their favorite sports team. Fans need the ethics of showing love in an appropriate way (Archer, 2021).

It can be considered that the love and support from fandom to sports teams can be stemmed out of passion. A scholar analyzed that passion can be a factor, but not all factors, to encourage life fulfillment. Passion is involved with the satisfaction of good feelings but meaningful life is more than just living the entire life being satisfied by good feelings (Wolf, 2010: 12-13). However, can it be possible for sports fans to have a passion for violence? If it can be, could it be considered that they can have their passion for violent sports and can get themselves easily satisfied with the fulfillment? In Kadlac’s book, it is explained that, for the fans to be satisfied with the fulfillment of passion for violent sports, it can be explicated in the light of being the passionate audience of Shakespeare’s tragedies (pp. 33-39). However, in the case children get themselves into being players or audiences of violent sports, should they be allowed? Kadlac’s answer is No! Children are not to be damaged physically or mentally (pp. 88-91).

Kadlac's current book contains many thought-provoking issues, all of which are of great interest. It is interesting both when adapting to the situation of the sport during the COVID-19 pandemic, and still being applicable even in the post-pandemic future. It is human nature the desire to be indulged in the flavor of watching sporting events and cheering on their favorite sports teams. I, therefore, consider that in the future this book will be indispensable in the academic field of philosophy of sport and sports ethics.

References

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