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WINNING AND LOSING: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

A Dissertation in
Kinesiology

by

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**ABSTRACT**

The concept of winning and losing is deeply ingrained in the Western approach to competition. Much of this emphasis on the winning vs. losing dichotomy comes from exponential growth in professional sports and business-oriented intercollegiate athletics. Sports are big business. Now parents of young children are often pushing the win vs. lose concept beginning with teams for very young children through high school sports.

This dissertation has three hypotheses: While dichotomous characterizations of sporting achievement enjoy degrees of validity, they are insufficient; these insufficiencies can be shown metaphysically and normatively, and; traditions and practices of Zen Buddhism can be used effectively as a source for rival conceptions of sporting achievement.

This study examines winning and losing from a Western perspective by examining dualisms and dichotomies, complementary pairs, and Darwinian roots of dichotomies. Then it examines the nature of sporting tests, test variations and related meanings, test contingencies and related meanings, the complexity and nature of sporting contests, test-contest relationships, and seven types of winning ~ losing.

A brief history of Buddhism is presented, followed by a discussion on the four principles of Zen: meditation, mindfulness, moral action, and moral thought. Then Zen principles and practices are translated into sport and movement.

The final chapter applies Zen philosophy to coaching youth baseball. Practice and participation guidelines for youth baseball coaches discuss: Zen mysticism, Zen as a high-demand practice, pragmatics, diversity, and self-transformation. It concludes with a case study using a Zen-inspired coaching method on how to field grounders.
If coaches stop placing an over-emphasis on winning vs. losing and encourage youth players to experience the game from a holistic, peaceful, and calm Zen approach, the children will begin to also have harmony and oneness with equipment, with their physical ~ mental approach to playing, and experience a self-transformation of seeing baseball without the mental clutter of anxiety or worry about winning vs. losing. By using Zen coaching techniques, children and teens can learn to play the sport for the sake of the experience the game offers, the enjoyment of playing, and for the growth and development Zen and baseball offers in the sport and in life.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... viii

Chapter 1 Dichotomies: The Importance of Winning (and Not Losing) ...................... 1

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1
The Significance of Winning and Losing and Related Dichotomies ......................... 2
Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................ 11
Hypotheses .................................................................................................................... 11
Significance of the Research ....................................................................................... 20
Unique Aspects of This Research and Organization of Chapters ............................ 20

Chapter 2 Understanding Winning and Losing From a Western Perspective .............. 22

Dualisms and Dichotomies ......................................................................................... 22
Opposition between two identities ............................................................................. 24
Opinion by degree ...................................................................................................... 25
Opinion by cut ............................................................................................................ 27
Hierarchical ordering of the pair .............................................................................. 31
The pair sum up and define a whole ........................................................................ 32
Transcendence .......................................................................................................... 33
Complementary Pairs ................................................................................................. 35
Darwinian Roots of Dichotomous Thought .............................................................. 39
Social Darwinism and Its Roots of Dichotomization ................................................. 43
Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 45

Chapter 3 The Complexity of Competition and Associated Meanings ..................... 47

Introduction ............................................................................................................... 47
The Nature of Sporting Tests ..................................................................................... 48
Test Variations and Related Meanings .................................................................... 53
Test Contingencies and Related Meanings .............................................................. 60
Discrepancies of measurement ............................................................................... 60
Differences in closed and open tests ........................................................................ 61
Impact of luck and chance ....................................................................................... 65
Officiating errors ....................................................................................................... 67
Human errors ............................................................................................................ 68
Unintentional bias errors ......................................................................................... 68
Intentional bias errors ............................................................................................. 69
Fixing of matches ...................................................................................................... 70
Subjective scoring errors ......................................................................................... 70
Performance capabilities ......................................................................................... 71
Intentional manipulation of testing scores ............................................................... 72
Variable records ...................................................................................................... 72
The Complexity of Sporting Contests ................................................................. 77
Nature of Sporting Contests............................................................................... 77
Seven Types of Winning ~ Losing ..................................................................... 79
   Blowout win....................................................................................................... 80
   Clear-cut win ..................................................................................................... 80
   Close win ........................................................................................................ 80
   The tie ............................................................................................................... 81
   Blowout loss, clear-cut loss, and close loss .................................................. 81
Test – Contest Relationships .......................................................................... 82
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 86

Chapter 4 Zen Buddhism and Holism in Sport .................................................. 90
   Introduction ...................................................................................................... 90
   Foundations of Zen Buddhism ...................................................................... 93
      Roots in mysticism ..................................................................................... 94
      Buddhism itself is not uniform ................................................................. 98
      Buddhism is a high-demand form of spirituality ..................................... 99
      Zen as a self-transformational philosophy ............................................ 100
      Zen has its roots in pragmatism .............................................................. 101
   Historical Roots of the Five Foundations .................................................. 102
      Genesis in India ....................................................................................... 103
      Genesis in China ..................................................................................... 108
      Genesis in Japan ...................................................................................... 115
      Zen and the West ..................................................................................... 121
   Principles of Zen ........................................................................................... 124
      Meditation .................................................................................................. 124
         Zazen techniques .................................................................................. 127
      Mindfulness ............................................................................................... 129
      Moral action ............................................................................................... 129
      Moral thought ............................................................................................ 130
   Translating Zen Principles and Practices Into Sport and Movement ............ 130
      Self vs. other ............................................................................................. 130
      Self vs. equipment .................................................................................... 133
      Planning vs. action ................................................................................... 134
      Process vs. product .................................................................................... 136
   Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 138

Chapter 5 Applying Zen Philosophy to Coaching Youth Baseball ...................... 141
   Introduction ................................................................................................... 141
   Youth Baseball and Zen ‘s Philosophy on Suffering ..................................... 144
   General Practices and Principles Inspired by Zen Buddhism ...................... 146
   Practice and Participation Guidelines Related to Mysticism ....................... 146
      Emphasize experience, not ideas and propositions .................................. 146
      Emphasize growth and evolution, not judgment ....................................... 147
      Emphasize focus of attention .................................................................... 147
      Emphasize the quality of experience, meaning, and depth over breadth .... 149
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Test Chart .................................................................................................................. 50
Table 3.2: Pass ~ Fail Level of Tests......................................................................................... 75
Table 3.3: Test – Contest Outcome Combinations. ................................................................. 82
Table 3.4: Closed Test/Contest.............................................................................................. 83
Table 3.5: Open Test/Contest. ............................................................................................... 85
Table 3.6: Contest Variations Chart ....................................................................................... 87
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Chapter 1

Dichotomies: The Importance of Winning (and Not Losing)

Introduction

On October 31, 1994, five months into his Presidency at Ohio University, Robert Glidden told Head Football Coach Tom Lichtenberg he was no longer going to hold that position, so Lichtenberg asked to be “reassigned” rather than fired. Lichtenberg had been head coach since 1990 and had a record of 8-42-2. However, he had inherited a losing team. Ohio University had not had a winning football season since 1982 when they went 6-5, and in the 18 years prior to 1994 they had only three winning campaigns. In the season before coming to Ohio University, Lichtenberg had a 9-3 record at the University of Maine and won the Yankee Conference in 1989-90. He finished third as National I-AA Coach of the Year (Richardson & Richardson, 1994, November 3, p. 12).

One of Lichtenberg’s strongest achievements at Ohio University was the high graduation rate of his players, including two years in which the university led the nation prior to his “reassignment.” Former Ohio University President Charles Ping often praised Lichtenberg for his emphasis on graduating his players and, partly because of this, extended his contract through the 1996-97 academic year. However, Ping retired at the end of the 1993-94 academic year and the new President, Robert Glidden, having just served as Provost at Florida State University before coming to Ohio University, had different priorities. Florida State was the national champion that year and it had long
been an institution where football was the tail that often wagged the academic dog (p. 12).

Lichtenberg, not Glidden, minced no words at the press conference announcing his reassignment. “In athletics, success, whether you believe it or not, is determined on the wins and losses. It’s not the character that you build or the gradation rate or anything else. It’s all on wins and losses” (p. 12).

While such behavior is not universal in American sport, the fact remains that similar scenarios are played out each season in numerous high school, college, and professional sport settings. Often they are based on one data set and one data set only – the won/loss record. Winning, it appears, is often “everything,” the “only thing,” and the basis for what many see as a disturbing trend that has been carried even to the level of youth sports. This over-emphasis on winning in sport results not only in unethical behavior by both youngsters and adults, but also in criminal behavior in some instances.

The growing and seemingly irrational emphasis on winning at every level of sport in the United States raises important philosophic questions and serves as the basis for this dissertation. This focus on winning raises metaphysical questions about how we conceptualize success in sport. Not far behind are normative questions about how we value achievement in sporting contexts. In the pages that follow, both sets of questions will be addressed.

The Significance of Winning and Losing and Related Sport Dichotomies

The concepts of winning and losing are so ingrained in the Western approach to competition that sport seems unthinkable in the absence of these key ingredients.
However, the notions of winning and losing with which we are so comfortable are, at least in part, a product of Western thought. A reliance on dichotomies, linear relationships, hierarchies, and distinctions between strength and weakness, the haves and the have-nots, often characterizes the way Western thought tries to make sense of the world. The focus on the dichotomy of winning vs. losing is grounded in another dichotomy, process vs. product. In this framework the process is no longer the central focus, but the product created is all that matters. This product is often seen as a separate and valued commodity quite apart from the quality of the actual competition.

Sport participants also experience a number of other dichotomies during their formative stages and beyond. As the participant experiences sports such as baseball, they encounter ideas such as self vs. target. Is the target out there as an object to be hit by an athlete’s actions, or is it actually coming to the athlete, such as catching a ground ball? Another dichotomy that concerns athletic participants is the distinction between self vs. equipment. Players often refer to the bat, ball, or glove as separate entities, but in actuality these items can become extensions of who they are as baseball players.

Finally, another dichotomy of great concern in sport is planning vs. action. Planning comes first; action comes second. Planning produces control; action reveals the effects of that control. But again, some players report that sporting skill is all one piece. The planning is in the action, and the action is in the planning. Western tendencies to divide up the sporting world may well have their limitations. Western tendencies to see winning and losing in exclusive opposition to one another may not be entirely helpful.

When referring to Western philosophies, this is not meant to tie such ideas strictly to a given geographical area. In point of fact, much so-called Western thinking has now
infiltrated cultures that traditionally approached life very differently. It could be that these Western thought patterns are tied to economic and industrial commitments as much as historical or cultural traditions. However that may be, that is a story for another research project and another time. Much of the emphasis on winning vs. losing, succeeding vs. failing, controlling vs. being controlled and related dichotomous sport concepts comes from developments in professional sports and business-oriented intercollegiate athletics. Simply put, sports are big business, and the won/loss patterns have a great deal to do with the bottom line.

With this ability to generate large profits from sport, the emphasis on winning has increased exponentially in virtually every level of sport, albeit less so for sports geared towards younger children. Over approximately the past forty years, the financial stakes related to sport have grown tremendously. For example, according to the Baseball Almanac, “In 1975, the average salary in Major League Baseball was $44,676. In 2010, the average salary shot up to $3,344,133” (Baseball Almanac, 2012, January 23). The following Wikipedia entry on professional athlete’s salaries is stunning:

People involved in professional sports can earn a great deal of money. For instance, the highest-paid team in professional baseball is the New York Yankees. Tiger Woods is the highest paid athlete totaling $127,902,706 including his endorsement income, which massively exceeds what he earns from tournament golf. Tiger recently became the world’s first athlete to earn a billion dollars from prize money and endorsements. It would have taken the salary of 2,000 1980s professional golfers each making $58,500 to match up with Tiger Woods’ current salary. Lionel Messi is the world’s highest paid footballer raking in £29.6 million (over $45 million) a year including off-field earnings. The top ten tennis players make about $3 million a year on average. Much of the growth in income for sports and athletes has come from broadcasting rights. For example, the 2011-2013 NFL
broadcast contract has been valued at $20.4 billion. . . . In the
NFL average salaries by position in 2009 were: Quarterback
$15 million, Defensive Tackle $1.224 Million, Running Back $5
Million. (“Wikipedia,” 2012, January 23)

This trend will continue, according to MarketWeek, one of the leading research
firms for global advertising, which reported in its January 23, 2012 online edition, in an
article that said the sports industry worldwide, by the year 2015, will receive “more
revenue from sponsorship than gate receipts.” The online article explained:

The return of financial services and automotive companies to
the sponsorship market is set to drive a “significant growth in
sponsorship spending” over the next four years, according to a
report on the outlook for the global sports market from PwC.
Sponsorship revenue is estimated to generate $45.3bn
(£28.9bn) in revenue in 2015 and become the largest segment
in sport, compared to $44.7bn (£28.6bn) for gate revenues, the
second biggest slice of the market. EMEA, the second largest
region in the sports market behind North America, is set to
gain from a massive boost in sponsorship in 2012, due to the
European football championships in Poland and Ukraine and
the London Olympics. The London 2012 Olympics has raised
more than £700m in sponsorship, from brands including BP,
British Airways and Lloyds. Even more money will be spent on
sponsorship by international partners such as Coca-Cola,
McDonald’s and P&G. Euro 2012 has 12 official global
sponsors. Earlier this year Manchester United was ranked the
“most valuable sporting team in the world” largely due to its
commercial deals with more than 20 global partners -
including Aon, Nike, Audi and DHL - who together pay £110m a
year to be affiliated with the club. (“MarketWeek,” 2012,
January 23)

Additionally, the article went on to explain why advertising and other
sponsorships are alive and well in the global sports market:

Overall, the global sports market is set to grow 3.7% in revenues at
an annual compound growth rate to $145.3bn (£92.9bn). PwC says
the market will be boosted by a rebound in TV advertising and the
migration of sports to pay TV, as well as the rise in sponsorship. Latin America is predicted to have the highest revenue growth rate at 4.9%, partly due to Brazil hosting the 2014 World Cup, followed by North America at 4%. ("MarketWeek," 2012, January 23)

Beginning with the popularity of televised Super Bowl football competitions in the 1960s, and taking off with the first broadcast of Monday Night Football in 1970 (which aired until 2005 on ABC before being bought by ESPN, and is one of the highest rated television programs in history), televised sporting events continued the trend of ratings increasing exponentially with the immense popularity of ESPN which exploded onto the airwaves in 1979 and has grown in popularity and channels since then. This trend continues as the 2012 Super Bowl was the most watched television show ever. The ability to bring sport to millions worldwide through cable television brought an incredible amount of advertising capital to the scene, which translated into larger salaries for players, managers, coaches, and virtually anyone else associated with a professional sport.

These economic facts suggest that dichotomous conceptions of success vs. failure in sport track well with financial realities. Winners make more money. Winners attract more favorable attention. Losers find themselves on the opposite side of the ledger. In addition, there seems little incentive to acknowledge athletes or teams that fall in between. Being partly successful, winning only some of the time, or showing slow improvement are conditions that often lead to weak fan support, lower viewer ratings for broadcasts, lower advertising revenues, and the replacement of coaches.

Economics is not the only force that promotes dichotomous conceptions of sport in the Western world. Some influences come from broader cultural institutions. Media
scholar Marshall McLuhan (1964), in his landmark book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, argued that the medium of television determined the message, which captivated mass audiences and gave viewers a sense of being part of a tribe or a global village (pp. 268-287). In fact, McLuhan devoted an entire chapter in his ground-breaking study to games themselves and how different media affected the impact of games on societies, particularly highly individualized Western societies (pp. 207-216). McLuhan argued:

Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and of the body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism. Both games and technologies are counter-irritants or ways of adjusting to the stress of specialized actions that occur in any social group. As extension of the popular response to the workaday stress, games become faithful models of a culture. They incorporate both the action and the reaction of whole populations in a single dynamic image. (p. 208)

McLuhan, who is probably best know to the masses for his mantra, “the medium is the message,” explains in this passage why the marriage of television and sport exploded in popularity throughout the world, but particularly in the United States, during the latter half of the twentieth century. In 2012, as ESPN adds more cable channels to offer viewing of everything from professional poker to high school championship baseball tournaments, American’s love affair with televised sports and games has apparently not yet reached its peak.

It is also important to understand the connection between the growth of global advertising, marketing and public relations, on the one hand, and the overemphasis on winning vs. losing in many Western societies, on the other. Newsom and Carell, in their chapter on global advertising and public relations in the book *Global Journalism: Survey*
of International Communication, demonstrated that although advertising and public relations practices vary significantly in various regions of the globe, the “Western model seems to be dominant in much of the world” (Merrill, 1995, p. 101). This helps to explain why global sport franchises were able to grow so rapidly and why the profit associated with sport also skyrocketed in the latter half of the twentieth century.

As global media systems were able to deliver more and more sport coverage around the world, another battle of philosophies was being steadily waged in the United Nations, with Western media systems (that highlighted values of winning and losing and the importance of individual glory) defeating rival ideologies. Grosswiler, in Merrill’s Global Journalism, Survey of International Communication (1995), gave a clear explanation of this important philosophical debate and its outcome:

Often, the attempt to change the existing information order is exclusively associated with a highly charged polarized debate in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the late 1970s and early 1980s over merits of a ‘new international information order,’ also known as the New World Information Order (NWIO). . . Both proponents of NWIO in UNESCO – mostly from newly liberated opponents – including mostly Western nations and their media – considered this to be a ‘new’ and unique attempt. The U.S. media, and to a lesser degree, the U.S. government categorically attacked any attempt to change the structure of the Western-dominated global media system. (p. 103)

With this debate successfully won, Western philosophies were able to be the driving force behind the growth of televised sport worldwide, and, thus, the driving force behind the ever growing emphasis on the dichotomous, value-laden winning vs. losing paradigm in sport.
The conceptual power of dichotomous notions of winning vs. losing may have also been fostered on the political stage. Roberts and Olson (1989), in their book *Winning is the Only Thing, Sports in America Since 1945*, argue that the growth of mass popularity for sport had its true beginning with the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, August 6, 1945, followed by the second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki three days later – which collectively killed nearly 380,000 people instantly, and effectively ended World War II (p. 1). They concur that a new world order was created that took the power from aristocrats born into wealth and redistributed it to those able to capitalize on a new world of ultra nationalism, which brought with it a new set of values, first notably seen in the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee and the drastic changes that came with the 1948 Olympic Games (pp. 1-23). Those that won could set and enforce the rules and promote the products that they felt best exemplified the human characteristics that were, from their point of view, important. The West won and winning became better than losing.

However, whether the world-wide emphasis on winning vs. losing had its roots in economics, broader cultural influences found in television and other media, the politics of World War II, or even much earlier in Western thinkers like Plato or Aristotle, the important point for this research is that it is now the majority view. It is broadly accepted simply as “the way sport is,” as a metaphysical truism. Winning is often associated with all that is good, losing with the opposite. Shades of gray in this domain do not much matter.

This black and white philosophy was attributed (incorrectly) to the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi who was supposed to have coined the famous phrase,
“Winning is not the most important thing, it is the only thing!” This cliché found its way to many locker room walls, and became the rallying cry for college and professional sports in the 1960s (Valentine, 1979, p. 61). It became the dominant credo for sports in the latter half of the twentieth century for an American society driven by a philosophy that emphasized the glory of self over the whole, and a hierarchical view of society with winners at the top and losers at the bottom. As Lipsky stated in 1975, “sport is the symbolic expression of the values of the larger political and social milieu” (Izod in Holowchak (Ed.), 2002, p. 373). That milieu is a stratified meritocracy, one that emphasizes individual, comparative achievement and de-emphasizes most everything else. Thanks to mass media, (and computers, Blackberries, iPhones and now iPads) this message can now be brought to millions of individuals in their workplace, cars, and homes throughout the world (p. 373).

Izod (2002), in his essay entitled Television Sport and the Sacrificial Hero, talks about this phenomenon, which grew in the last 60 years as television ownership skyrocketed and eventually became a fixture in nearly every American household except the poorest of the poor. Even those individuals often had access to viewing televised sport competitions at bars and other public venues. Izod states, “Viewers have a need for heroes, and those heroes, as television coverage shows, are almost always winners.” (p. 371).

There is little question that a dichotomous view of success vs. failure in sport is attractive. It promotes drama; it symbolically represents sport as a life or death kind of endeavor; it feeds off political divisions and meritocratic qualities that establish national identities. Because the drama of winning vs. losing is so compelling, sport attracts
attention. Because it attracts attention, it sells advertising and T-shirts along with other team memorabilia that rakes in millions upon millions of dollars. Dichotomous notions of sporting success are written into the very fabric of our culture and the ways we think about sport.

**Statement of the Problem**

The research problem addressed in this study is one of determining the accuracy of dichotomous conceptualizations of sporting achievement. Associated with this foundational problem is the possible existence of rival conceptions that provide superior characterizations. While comparative outcomes and relative degrees of success may well be unavoidable elements of competitive sport, questions remain about how best to portray (and experience) such achievements.

A related problem is associated with the application of rival conceptions of athletic achievement and how they might affect sporting practices, particularly in youth sport contexts. If non-dichotomous renditions of sport have any validity, they should affect how sport is introduced, practiced, and played.

**Hypotheses**

1. While dichotomous characterizations of sporting achievement enjoy degrees of validity, they are insufficient.

2. These insufficiencies can be shown metaphysically (they do not portray sporting experiences accurately) and normatively (they can generate harm).
3. Traditions and practices of Zen Buddhism can be used effectively as a source for rival conceptions of sporting achievement.

4. Zen-inspired, non-dualistic conceptions of sporting achievement can be applied successfully in youth baseball contexts.

In short, this dissertation will try to show that Western societies have a constrained and, thus, incomplete notion of winning and losing. This is the metaphysical side of this research. However, this dissertation will also argue that this misconception fosters an overemphasis on winning. This distortion, it will be argued, has caused a great deal of harm. This lack of understanding has caused an unhealthy shift in priorities both inside and outside the sports world. Winning is inappropriately equated with success and losing is errantly perceived as some kind of dreaded disease, if not worse. This is the normative side of the research.

The metaphysics and ethics of winning vs. losing are important because they generate negative perceptions of sport due largely to misbehavior in the quest for victory. The growing number of incidents of coaches and parents at youth sport competitions stepping over the proverbial line gives the impression that competition is dangerous, if not evil, and it is something to be avoided. However, competition per se, it will be argued in this study, is not the problem.

Competition can bring out the best in human nature. It is precisely the obstacles created by competition that are so important for human growth and development. Thus, in this dissertation, an argument for the elimination of competition will not be presented, but rather an argument for the discovery of new approaches that could improve what
people take away from competitive experiences will be made. Furthermore, it will be
argued that Zen Buddhism provides players, spectators and coaches alike with both a new
metaphysics and ethics for sporting competition. It provides distinctive theoretical
perspectives and practical approaches to problems associated with competition. Rather
than destroy competition, Zen Buddhism can provide a way to reconceptualize sport and
competition, not only to redeem sport in principle, but also to increase joyful
participation among those who compete, including youth.

In this dissertation it will be argued that, in fact, Zen preserves the need for
competition. Striving to face stiffer competition and striving to get better so that players
may face even greater challenges is where the value of competition and Zen resides.

Competition stimulates greater effort, and, therefore greater self-discovery. Gallwey
(1977) explained it well in his book *The Inner Game of Tennis*:

> Winning is overcoming obstacles to reach a goal, but the value of
> winning is only as great as the value of the goal reached. Reaching
> the goal itself may not be as valuable as the experience that can
> come in making a supreme effort to overcome the obstacles
> involved. The process can be more rewarding than the victory
> itself. (p. 108)

Why is such an emphasis placed on Zen Buddhism? To be sure, a number of
other philosophical approaches try to redirect sport into more acceptable avenues as well.
While these approaches have some value, they do not fully embrace the competition/sport
model. They fail, it can be argued, in two directions: 1) they distort sport by eliminating
or overly gentrifying competition, or; 2) they provide an antidote that is not strong
enough to cure the disease. In the first case, they change sport into something it is not,
usually some kind of bland, cooperative problem solving activity in which no
comparative scores are kept. In the second case, they try to counter the harsh zero-sum qualities of competition by making it more playful or by deflecting attention to “quick fix” meditative exercises. Neither cure seems robust enough to overcome the strong cultural influences mentioned earlier or the intellectual habits of the practitioners. Zen Buddhism not only preserves competition, but also promises strong medicine for dichotomy-related sporting fears.

Zen, as will be shown, emphasizes improved quality of experience as a function of training. This study will focus on winning and losing from a Zen perspective and attempt to understand different approaches to sport through the lens of Zen philosophy as well as more recent Western philosophies that are compatible with Zen. It will show how Zen Buddhism offers a dramatic and useful alternative to typical Western conceptions of sport. Importantly, Zen Buddhism’s approach to common sporting dichotomies is radically different from the one that is used in most other traditions. As with all unique and demanding approaches, Zen-inspired techniques in coaching also carry some risks or liabilities. I will discuss those in the last chapter as well.

Zen offers a very practical approach to life, one that can be helpful to adults who teach sport to children and to children who want to have a more rewarding experience in sport. This practicality will be demonstrated with a review the four principles of Zen. In order to live an enlightened life the four principles of meditation, mindfulness, moral action, and moral thinking must be practiced in all areas of life (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 8). Part of this dissertation will focus on how to apply these four principles to competitive sport in order to reconceptualize (and re-experience) the winning vs. losing dichotomy and overcome its potentially harmful consequences.
One key end or objective of Zen Buddhism, for example, is the elimination of ego-desire, a goal that flies in the face of an American culture that is typically obsessed with desire for ego-satisfaction in the form of wealth, happiness, possessions, success, and winning--both in sport and elsewhere. The Zen concept of ceasing to desire allows the individual to graduate to a more enlightened level of living in the moment, an achievement that has strong implications for competitive sport. It is important to understand the moral code, which underscores all Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhists believe that to achieve an enlightened mind, and thus to reach nirvana, they must apply the principles of meditation, mindfulness, moral action, and moral thinking to all aspects of life. Therefore, these principles will prove crucial when reinterpreting the dichotomy of winning vs. losing and the values it embodies.

Another key concept of Zen Buddhism that impacts the approach to winning and losing in sport is the concept of enlightenment. Enlightenment is also referred to as nirvana, satori, and daikensho in various Zen texts. To reach enlightenment the practitioner must go through the process of ending suffering. This suffering, according to Buddhist philosophy, is caused by desire. Therefore, to eliminate suffering desire must be eliminated. Again, this philosophy when applied to the overemphasis on the winning vs. losing dichotomy in modern day sport could be translated into an elimination of either-or outcomes, a reduction on the emphasis on one outcome in contrast to another, and a vision of the end of the game as a natural occurrence that must be experienced fully in the now and, because of all of this, an elimination of desire and its attendant suffering. The evolution of the overemphasis on winning in sport is likely linked to the increased emphasis on any number of desires—the desire for wealth, material goods, happiness,
health, a good job, winning awards and the endless lists of “wants” that is a driving force in the lives of many people today, particularly in economically developed societies.

Zen is a form of mysticism that acknowledges the inner-connectedness of the practitioner with their surroundings and nature. Practitioners experience a deep connection with all things and experience life differently, more richly. Athletes, at times, may also reach a connectedness with their surroundings that is difficult to explain outside the sport, but one that leaves the athlete with a deeper, richer experience. Murphy and White (1995), in the book *In the Zone, Transcendent Experience in Sport*, discuss “out of body” experiences that many athletes have described (pp. 63-65). They also talk about other types of mysticism connected to athletic experiences, which are not unlike the sensations described by those who practice meditation. Altered perceptions of time and feeling, a sense that time does not exist, have been experienced by many athletes and by many practicing Zen Buddhists. So it becomes easy to see that there are numerous ways in which Zen philosophy can be applied to sport so that the focus moves beyond the overemphasis on winning vs. losing and beyond the ultimate shallowness of that very basic approach to sport. This dissertation proposes to examine those philosophical links and to analyze those links.

In the final part of this dissertation, Zen Buddhist thought and practice will be applied to coaching youth baseball. Youth baseball was chosen since much has been written in the past ten years about the over emphasis on the dichotomy of winning vs. losing in youth sports.

Baseball was chosen for personal and philosophic reasons. Personally, baseball is a sport that was a big part of my youth and college experience. It is a sport I know well
and care about. I have seen through my own life experiences that baseball is not only tightly tethered to American culture, but can also play an important role in the development of a young person. Like many sports, baseball teaches discipline, perseverance, self-confidence and goal-setting.

Baseball’s role in American culture is somewhat unique. It is not just a sport, but a part of the history of America and it became “America’s pastime” when it was a highly popular form of relief for hardworking farmers and factory workers. As the country grew economically, so too did the popularity of baseball. In the first half of the twentieth century, some of America’s most popular heroes were baseball players such as Lou Gehrig, Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams and Babe Ruth.

The sport is also unique in how it impacts players. For example, hard balls can create a fear of failure (individual at plate), or a fear of harm or injury (fast pitching). In short, it fosters unique dichotomous elements of self vs. other. Baseball also has universal features that allow it to stand for all sports. Like all sports, it personifies the need for coordination, strength, speed, skill, and the dichotomous ways we deal with physical hurdles, and the concepts of achievement vs. failure and winning vs. losing.

A memorable incident in youth baseball occurred in June of 2005, as reported in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, when Mark Downs, Jr., the 27-year-old coach of a youth baseball team for 8- and 9-year-old boys, offered to pay $25 to an 8-year-old player to injure an autistic and mildly retarded 11-year-old teammate by throwing a ball at his head before a playoff game (Ayad, 2006, September 15). When the first ball thrown did not hurt the disabled child, Downs ordered the 8-year-old boy to, “go out there and hit him harder,” according to another article on the incident reported in the Pittsburgh Post-
Gazette (Ayad, 2005, July 29). Downs was eventually convicted on September 14, 2006, of criminal conspiracy to commit simple assault and corruption of minors, but was found not guilty of the more serious crime of criminal solicitation to commit aggravated assault (Ayad, 2006, September 15). Fayette County District Attorney Nancy Vernon may have made the understatement of the year following the verdict when she said:

Coaches and parents and teachers all owe a responsibility to bring children up, and particularly coaches, and teach them about teamwork and sportsmanlike conduct. This is a serious breach of sportsmanlike conduct. (Ayad, 2006, September 15)

On July 10, 2007, this case had yet another chapter come to a close when the appeal of Downs was rejected by a judge in a 19-page opinion, saying the arguments were “without merit” and let stand Downs’ one- to six-year prison sentence, which was imposed in 2006 (Associated Press, 2007, July 10).

Baseball is one of the most traditional sports in America with deep roots in American philosophies, approaches to living, and the enjoyment of life. It is imperative that society begin to find new ways of teaching youths to enjoy sports, such as baseball, without becoming caught in the trap of thinking winning is everything, let alone that it is unduly important.

Of course, baseball is not the only youth sport where an over emphasis on winning, making the team, or otherwise succeeding has led to shocking news headlines. The case of Wanda Holloway, the Texas mother so obsessed with her daughter making a cheerleading squad that it led to a murder-for-hire situation. Here is how one article in The New York Times told of this case:

Beneath the glamour of pom-poms and pep rallies, cheerleading is serious business in Channelview, Tex. And evidently none took it
more seriously than Wanda Webb Holloway. Two years running, Mrs. Holloway’s daughter, Shanna, failed to make the junior high school cheerleading squad, and Mrs. Holloway came to blame Verna Heath, the mother of Shanna’s chief rival, Amber. Authorities said that Mrs. Holloway asked her former brother-in-law, Terry Harper, to help her find someone who would kill Mrs. Heath for money. Mr. Harper went to the police. Mrs. Holloway’s lawyers said she was entrapped and that she never intended to hurt anyone. But prosecutors described her as ‘the ultimate stage mother’ who hoped that with Mrs. Heath dead, Amber would be too distraught to go on cheering, leaving an opening for Shanna. Last week, a jury found Mrs. Holloway guilty of solicitation of murder and sentenced her to 15 years in prison. (NA, 1991, September 8)

Admittedly, Wanda Holloway and Mark Downs, Jr., are extreme cases of parental morals gone awry in youth sport where the emphasis on winning and achieving has grown to unacceptable levels in recent times. What is worrisome, however, is this: If these kinds of egregious acts are occurring, how many subtler unacceptable behaviors that force winning on children are occurring throughout the United States each day -- behaviors that do not make the news or that are only known between the children and their parents?

This dissertation could have examined youth soccer, football, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, or a number of other sports as evidence of misguided ethics driven by the Western philosophical emphasis on individual glory and the need to be the best. Soccer teams for children as young as three years old are up and running in many municipalities. Teenagers and children are having reconstructive surgeries on elbows and knees that in the past were found mainly in elite venues of world-class athletes who had played a sport for many years. Youths are currently being driven by parents to play sports, including baseball, year round, a practice that wrecks havoc on their growing
bones, joints, ligaments, and muscles. This skewed approach to sport, for the sake of
winning and being a future sports star, must be reversed or at least modified.
Accordingly, the final chapter of this dissertation will apply a Zen Buddhist philosophy to
youth baseball. It will present a Zen-inspired program as one alternative to current
practices, an option that will actually allow young athletes to see competition in a
different light. This approach aims at training the minds of young athletes to distance
themselves from distortions produced by the winning vs. losing dichotomy, one that
permeates the culture around them.

Significance of the Research

1. Builds on previous research to show the limitations of dichotomous renditions of
   reality generally and sporting achievement specifically.
2. Provides an alternative account of sporting achievement that preserves
   competition while removing many of its ills.
3. Shows that Zen principles and practices can be applied to a youth baseball setting.

Unique Aspects of This Research and Organization of Chapters

This research is warranted by a lack of analysis in kinesiology and sport studies
related to several themes—the utility of dichotomies and dichotomous thinking, the
merits of the specific sport dichotomy of winning vs. losing and related dichotomies, the
potential for Zen Buddhist principles to provide helpful alternatives to those dichotomies,
and the application of findings to youth baseball. Chapter 2 will examine how and why
Western thought processes promote dichotomous thinking, even to a fault. Chapter 3 will
describe the conceptual limitations of two foundational sport dichotomies: success vs. failure and winning vs. losing. Chapter 4 looks at how the history of Zen Buddhism has inspired thought around the world, and how its principles can help transform our understanding of human existence in general and sporting projects specifically. In chapter 5 these Zen principles are applied to youth baseball to help improve the game, and to argue for a unified notion of process/product. This would be a better way of understanding the game and what can be gained by playing it.

The originality of this study is based on the attempt to show how and why practical problems with youth sport can be traced back, in part, to philosophic commitments. It focuses on Western metaphysical tendencies to portray achievement in dichotomous terms and the normative consequences that can follow. While much has been written on Zen and sport, no major studies, articles, or books have been written on this topic. No previous research has attempted to apply Zen philosophy to coaching youth baseball. This dissertation proposes to analyze Zen Buddhism as it relates to Western approaches to winning vs. losing to demonstrate a new philosophical approach that not only preserves competition, but may very well serve as a promising way to rescue sport and competition from the miasma of the modern zealous, myopic view that winning at all costs is justified.
Chapter 2

Understanding Winning and Losing From a Western Perspective

Dualisms and Dichotomies

In Western societies dualisms and dichotomies, such as mind and body, hope and despair, and love and hate as polar opposites, are typically regarded as concepts that logically exclude one another. One extreme often represents a position to attain or otherwise value while the other is to be avoided and judged inferior. Western cultural thought has so polarized dichotomous pairs that there no longer appears to be connections between the two ends of what might be seen as a spectrum or differences by degree. Winning and losing is one such pair.

In the United States, as well as in other nations, people are taught to be winners. Winning is not everything it is “the only thing,” as one extreme statement puts it. It has forgotten that winning is intimately related to losing, and that losing is tied closely to winning. Winning is so strongly preferred that often people do not even speak of that other thing -- losing. So much normative value is now placed on winning that losing seems a fate worse than death. Sport is now so hyper-focused on winning that it has seen attempts to win generate violent behavior, the kind that has resulted in serious injury and even deaths. In many societies, but particularly in the United States, to be a loser is to be a nonentity. In other words, the win vs. lose dichotomy is intimately tied to a person’s identity and self-esteem. It is not good enough to be “sort of a winner” or a
“sometimes winner.” A person is typically identified as one or the other, either a winner or a loser.

Losing, therefore, begins to symbolize what is wrong in the world. Losing has such negative connotations that we do not even want to talk of the possibility of not winning. We focus on “winning at all costs” because it is no longer acceptable to be a loser. Our either/or metaphysical and normative thinking presents only one option (winning) as acceptable when we play or watch sports. Dichotomous thinking coupled with an extreme emphasis on winning has so changed the structure and mood of our games that we no longer play baseball, for example, just for the joy of playing baseball. Rather we play to win and no other outcome will validate the effort. No other outcome will generate pleasure, worthy self-discovery, enlightenment, self-fulfillment or a sense of achievement.

Bifurcations limit conceptual options. Because of this, dualisms have the potential to distort the nature of reality (metaphysics) and the proper value found in different parts of that reality (ethics). The reduction of competitive outcomes to winning and losing suggests that such conclusions come in twos; that such outcomes are most faithfully described when portrayed as exclusive pairs. Likewise, the assignment of value must then honor this simple division. Value cannot be attributed to outcomes in terms of threes, fours, or even more complex conceptualizations. Coaches and others, who have been socialized to think dichotomously, see the world as winners being good and losers as being negative. Understanding of winning and losing becomes entrenched in oppositional terms. The question is whether or not that also distorts the values in sport.
Prokhovnik believes this is so and has expressed similar concerns which transcend the domain of sport. In *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique of Dichotomy* (2002) she describes the issue as follows:

> When it is analyzed, dichotomy can be seen to contain four important defining features, though these do not exhaust the analysis. The four features are an opposition between two identities, a hierarchical ordering of the pair, the idea that between them this pair sum up and define a whole, and the notion of transcendence. (p. 23)

**Opposition between two identities.** Opposition can take different forms. In dichotomies they are often exclusionary. That is, the existence or nature of one eliminates the possibility of the existence or nature of the other. This is thought to be the case with winning and losing. Winning excludes losing and vice versa. An athlete cannot be a winner and a loser at the same time.

In opposition terms the dichotomy of winning vs. losing is winning/not losing. These terms are used to distinguish between two and only two possible outcomes (barring ties). Normative distortions are likely to follow in such a world. This is the case because degrees of merit are eliminated or overlooked when the outcome must be understood as one or the other. This leads to a mindset that winning is a must, and a game lost is a game that was not worth playing. Winning must occur because the only other option is not winning, and that is not acceptable.

Butler addresses this conceptual framework of dichotomous thinking thusly:

> Opposites are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. (Butler cited in Prokhovnik, 2002, p. 23)
Winning vs. losing is thought to reside in a zero-sum relationship. They are mutually exclusive. If winning is A, then losing is Not-A. Winning is the preferred state and thus, by definition, the opposite becomes the non-preferred state. Losing, when conceptualized this way, leaves little room for acknowledging the possibility of playing very well while scoring fewer runs than the opposition. It leaves little room for acknowledging improvement in the face of a more skilled team while still coming up short, even though this can happen too. Rather it connotes utter failure. Kretchmar (1975) argued against this simplistic understanding of athletic achievement by describing two kinds of opposition that ground the sporting experience (Kretchmar cited in Morgan & Meier, 1995).

**Opposition by degree.** Kretchmar, in the article *From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint in Sport*, explains that differences need not be understood as mutually exclusive dichotomies. He does so by describing two kinds of opposition. The first is opposition by degree.

One basic kind of point-counterpoint, as described by Ogden... is opposition by scale. This involves one phenomenon ranging in degree from 0 to 100. There is no juxtaposition of logical opposites anywhere between the extremes, but simply more and less of some element as one moves up the scale and down, respectively. Common examples of such opposition are black-white, empty-full and poor-rich. Black, for instance, is the total absence of white and is given a position at the zero end of this hypothetical scale. Black becomes charcoal, grey, light grey, and so on as one moves “up” this scale toward absolute white or the 100 point. (Kretchmar cited in Morgan & Meier, 1995, p. 36)

It is interesting to note, particularly in context to analyses that will come later in the dissertation, that Zen Buddhism often uses the empty-full metaphor in describing
reality. In similar fashion, Kretchmar sees competition (contest) as grounded in this opposition by degree since contestants are attempting to do the same thing as their competitors, yet better, therefore by degree. For example, a basketball player who is the top rebounder in a game with 15 boards, compared to the top rebounder for the opposing team who gets 10 boards, has out performed the other player, but he has done so only by degree. If the difference between the top rebounders for each opposing team were 20 to 5, then the degree to which the top player outperformed the other team would simply be greater. Kretchmar sees this type of “opposition by degree” as an alternative to the winning vs. losing dichotomy. In at least one sense, it is a more helpful alternative because it accounts for relative success.

A basketball team that scores 75 points has completed the same test that its opponents have completed when they scored 68 points. The difference here is one of degree. This portrays winning or losing not as an absolute condition or achievement, but as a relative and variable phenomenon. A winning score presupposes another like score that is further down the scale. A losing score presupposes another like score that is further up the scale. Thus, winning and losing are assigned relative positions on a single scale. Importantly, there are infinite degrees of differences possible in this juxtaposition of winner and loser, degrees that vary from barely discernible to extreme. How odd then that often this variation is reduced to a pair of outcome possibilities. And how dangerous it might be to assign full value to one side of the dichotomy over the other.

Nevertheless, the extreme over-emphasis on winning that has evolved in Western culture, coupled with the tendency to see winning and losing as zero-sum outcomes, has
muted these point-counterpoint oppositions by scale to mere statistics assigned to the exclusive outcomes of winning vs. losing.

**Opposition by cut.** It could be argued that opposition by degree has conceptually morphed into the second kind of point-counterpoint described by Kretchmar – namely, opposition by cut. Opposition by cut acknowledges that some realities do, in fact, exclude one another, or at least that it can be helpful to conceptualize them in this way. Right and wrong may be helpfully conceived as exclusive opposites. In math, $2 + 2 = 4$. That is right. Any other answer is wrong. In most cases, it may not matter if one is a little bit wrong or a lot wrong. Any answer other than 4 is wrong, period.

In this regard, it is true that winning and losing can helpfully be understood as an opposition by cut. An athlete cannot be ahead and behind at the same time. A player cannot finish a game against a single opponent with both the higher and the lower score. But this is only part of the story. On each side of the cut, there are infinite degrees of difference. How much ahead? How much behind? How did the team move ahead? How did the player fall behind?

It is more common in Western culture, as noted above, to regard winning as A and losing as not-A. The A vs. not-A dichotomy has to make do for all the different kinds of outcomes seen in games—late reversals or close games, blowouts, extreme domination by one team, games decided by umpiring errors, games that are aesthetically pleasing and those that are not. The ever-growing cultural emphasis on winning would downplay the difference between winning by a large degree (a blowout) versus winning by a small degree (such as kicking the winning field goal in the last two seconds of the
football game). Dichotomy is chosen over difference by degree. Winning as distinct from losing is chosen over a model in which winning is seen to include degrees of losing and losing is appreciated for including degrees of winning.

It is important to note that this preference is so strong that the third logical option for sporting comparisons—a tie game—is largely ignored. Ties do not fit into neat and tidy dichotomous models. Some would even regard a tie as a failed game, while on a scale of relative differences; a tie is just as valid as any other outcome. It is no surprise then that a tie lacks value. It is a non-verdict. It does not fit the either/or paradigm for contests, so it is pretended to not exist or convenient ways are found to avoid the tie through shootouts or sudden death overtimes. In an article that appeared in the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (JOPERD)*, McLaughlin and Torres (2005, November 1) remarked that:

Influenced by an ethos with an exaggerated interest in winning and losing, one that influences both sport and the culture in which it is embedded, the validity of contests that end in a tie is typically spurned. In fact, the trend of sport institutions is to force a winner and a loser rather than allow contests to end in a tie, regardless of the parity of play displayed throughout the contest.

Even as a teaching tool in physical education, for a setting that does not necessarily require a focus on the winning and losing paradigm, there must be closure. That closure is reached when one child or one team is identified as the winner and the other as the loser. Winning motivates, and school teachers know this. Little else really matters.

Here is how Kretchmar describes this second type of exclusionary opposite:

A second kind of point-counterpoint. . . is opposition by “cut” . . . This places two phenomena on opposite sides of a zero point.
When this point is crossed in either direction, a phenomenon immediately changes to its opposite. Opposition by “cut” is characteristic of all logical opposites which, by nature, exclude one another. Opposite direction and two of its bases, attraction and repulsion, involve opposition by “cut.” Sense-nonsense, possible-impossible, true-false and A-not A exemplify this kind of contrariety. It may be the case that a scale exists on one or both sides of the “cut.” For example, different actions are thought to be more or less possible while impossibility would seem to admit of no variation. But the fact remains that the zero point separates two exclusive opposites and does not stand at one extreme of a distinction by degree. (Kretchmar cited in Morgan & Meier, 1995, pp. 36-37)

This is how winning vs. losing is seen. Currently the magnetic pull to dichotomize terms is strong. One such term often heard is, “you’re either with us or you’re against us.” Wearing a flag lapel pin is patriotic and not wearing one is the opposite. While these are misleading dichotomies at best and false dichotomies at worst, they show a tendency to dichotomize terms into oppositional perspectives.

From an anthropological perspective, this gravitation to opposition by cut may have had adaptive value. It is a kind of thinking, in other words, that modern humans inherited from their ancestors. Gould, in 2003, made precisely this claim.

I rather suspect this innate propensity [to dichotomize] represents little more than ‘baggage’ from an evolutionary past of much simpler brains built only to reach those quick decisions – fight or flight, sleep or wake, mate or wait – that make all the difference in a Darwinian world of nonconscious animals. Perhaps we have never been able to transcend the mechanics of a device built to generate simple twofold divisions, and have had to construct our greater complexities upon such a biased and inadequate mental substrate. (Gould cited in Kretchmar, 2007, p. 278)

As Kretchmar has rightly pointed out, contests are grounded in differences by degree. Contestants exhibit the same kinds of skills, and try to do so to a greater degree.
As noted, in many games, these differences are very slight. In such cases, contestants have reason to feel good about their overall performances, particularly if they played well. However, in Western societies, as Tom Lichtenberg so aptly stated (as mentioned in Chapter 1), “success, whether you believe it or not, is determined on the wins and losses. It’s not the character that you build or the graduation rate or anything else. It’s all on wins and losses” (Richardson & Richardson, 1994, November 3, p. 12). No matter how well people played, and no matter how close a score might have been, everything boiled down to two exclusionary outcomes. This is the either/or thinking of dichotomies and opposition by cut.

As noted by Kretchmar when describing opposition by cut, dichotomous pairs forced a choice between seemingly opposite terms or realities. To take one side is to avoid the other. One is either A or not-A. This type of “either-you-are-this-or-not” kind of thinking restricts understanding of certain types of pairs. It closes out third or fourth possibilities, or even how a range of opportunity exists between pairs. In trying to distinguish between outcomes, it is often expressed as what the outcome is and then what it is not. Similarity of outcomes is no longer considered, but only how they differ.

Winning vs. losing is seen this way. Winning is scoring more than the opponent and losing is not. Losing is seen as being opposite of winning and the realm between the two terms is largely ignored. Winning is what the aim is, losing is opposite of winning, so losing is not the aim of the game. They are oppositional terms because one cannot be the other.
Hierarchical ordering of the pair. It is difficult to divide without ranking.

Dichotomous thinking, therefore, often attributes a hierarchical order to the two terms at issue. Grosz (1994) describes this tendency in the following way:

For [d]ichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchies and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart. (p. 3)

If ranking dichotomous pairs is likely in general, it is even more inevitable in the world of sport. This is so because competitive sport is about comparisons. Sport is an artificial world of drama in which the primary point is to outperform the other. Thus, when “better” is viewed through the eye of dichotomous thinking, winning becomes the Holy Grail, the sole aim of competition. Losing is the opposite. Winning is all that is right and good and losing is entirely unacceptable. Losing takes on the negative connotation of something gone horribly wrong.

In such a world a host of qualitative distinctions is lost. Honorable victories, honorable defeats? Hollow victories? Valiant efforts? A come-from-behind effort that fell just short? In a “bottom-line,” dichotomous environment, these qualitative achievements carry little weight. Even close seconds need not apply. In such a world there would be little reason to play teams that were better. There is no learning that would matter, no progression of athletic skill that would count in the face of failure. Only winning would matter. The contest itself, good or bad, is insignificant. The normative criterion of the day is victory, nothing else.

Differences by degree, of course, can also be ranked. But here the nuances of difference are preserved. Here the actual juxtaposition of relative success and failure is
seen in all of its rich variation. In the face of this information, it is far more difficult to say that one result was all good or that another result was all bad.

The pair sum up and define a whole. As Prokhovnik (2002) explains, dichotomies not only are mutually exclusive, they become mutually exhaustive. These two positions in a dichotomous pair become the only two options available. This ignores a myriad of possible outcomes associated with competition. The universe of game outcomes, in a dichotomous world, consists of two choices, one of which cannot be acceptable because it is not the other. We see over and over again in sport that the end result of such a constrained universe is the simplistic interpretation of game results. Because the sum of the pair - win or lose - is exhaustive of all possibilities, there is no room for other factors to be considered as worthy of contributing to the final total. As long as the equation of the contest is solely based on the two rigid sides of a pair in order to reach the final sum of the outcome, there is no room for experiencing sport from other dimensions. This holds true whether the person experiencing the sport is an athlete playing in the contest or a fan watching the game. Nowhere, then, is there room for fans whose team loses the Super Bowl to appreciate the many excellences and achievements that may have been embedded in that defeat. They are least inclined to say, “there was a lot of winning in that defeat” or conversely for those in the winning side, “there was a lot of losing in that victory.” All they are left to feel, contemplate, or react to is the collective lack of success shown by the losing team.

The concept of dichotomies as mutually exhaustive seems to have become more extreme in direct relation to the amount of money to be made in a given sport. This is
particularly true in most sports in the United States. It becomes advantageous to see the dichotomy as mutually exhaustive in order to eliminate the possibility of moving from one side of the dichotomy (winner) to the other (loser). The exhaustive dichotomy in the eyes of the sport entrepreneur may promote drama, angst, identity, and profits, but it may also run roughshod over the reality of the contest. As argued later in this dissertation, this may be unfortunate in general, but it has particularly dangerous consequences in youth sport.

**Transcendence.** The important defining feature identified by Prokhovnik is transcendence. She describes it in the following way.

Transcendence is the sole mechanism by which, in the Western intellectual tradition, access from the inferior term to the superior term can be made. Thus there is a sense of movement upwards, of ascendance, between the pair. But in the Western intellectual tradition, in the many uses of dichotomies for distinguishing between groups of people, this transcendence can typically only be achieved by one category of people defined by their not being the other kind. (Prokhovnik, 2002, p. 30)

Transition, according to Prokhovnik, is the movement from the lower of two categories to the higher one. Because only two locations exist, and because the lower one is deemed unacceptable, transcendence becomes a necessity. There is no category for people who are often successful, or sort-of successful, or who prevail only 50 percent of the time. Transcendence marks the change from the unacceptable to the acceptable. Gray areas and murky successes only diminish any sense of (and value attributed to) transcendence.

We see that it is often the truly coordinated child, who is in a category of middle-to upper-class opportunity that allows him or her to be in the category of athletically
talented. Coupled with family wealth that provides opportunity to better teams and coaching this allows the athletically talented child to transcend from an inferior (undeveloped) young athlete to perhaps the star quarterback for the high school football team (or the girl who becomes an All-American standout basketball sensation). This transcendence can also be seen in the talented child living in impoverished conditions who practices and practices basketball skills – often driven by the idea that basketball is his ticket out of a life of poverty – who makes the transition from underdeveloped youth athlete to immensely talented adult professional athlete. In both of these cases, as Prokhovnik points out, in Western intellectual tradition this transcendence results in these athletes joining the category of superior athlete, which now is defined by them not being in the other category.

This also separates people into winners and losers and creates two athletic classes: those who can win and those who lose. Because losers often find it difficult to attain winning status, and because that is the only place where rewards are guaranteed, they may no longer have any reason to compete. These athletes often self-select away from sport. They see their own limitations as defining who they are. At once, they accept their current utter failure and the unlikely possibility of future transcendence. Not surprisingly, we see coaches beginning at the youth level of sport looking for the potential in children to be able to grow as an athlete, to be able to win. They focus on these gifted athletes giving them the majority of the playing time and attention, often to the detriment of all others.

Because Western philosophy, which is often linear, so prevails in American society, it becomes very difficult for recruiters, coaches, and even parents to avoid the
trap of looking for that ability for an athlete to develop – to grow – from a category of poor to average along the linear path to that of a great athlete. Again, as discussed in the next chapter, applying Zen philosophy to the overarching concept of winning vs. losing that frames so many of these approaches to sport, we will see a different type of transcendence that, in fact, is not couched in a linear sequential pattern but rather in the non-linear development of the whole person.

**Complementary Pairs**

Previously, it was noted that there may be third or even fourth options to the mutually exclusive dichotomies of winning vs. losing. Seeing the world through the lens of complementary pairs is one such option. Complementary pairs offer options to understanding these same terms, not as opposites, but as intersecting and overlapping pieces of a continuous puzzle. Kelso and Engstrom (2006) offer a comprehensive study of what they call “the complimentary nature” of reality in their book of the same title. They do not see dichotomies as necessarily contradictory, but rather as complementary pairs that provide a better description of the way humans experience these terms.

...spurred on by the desire to reconcile apparent contraries, we make our first move: we replace all related but slightly different terms like contraries, polar opposites, duals, opposing tensions, binary oppositions, dichotomies, and the like with the all-encompassing term “complementary pairs.”... We refer to the polarized aspects of complementary pairs as “complementary aspects.” For example, “body” and “mind” are complementary aspects of the complementary pair “body~mind.” We use the tilde~ not to concatenate words or as an iconic bridge between polarized aspects, but to signify that we are discussing complementary pairs. Equally if not more important, the tilde symbolizes the *dynamic nature* of complementary pairs. ...it is not only the polar complementary aspects of complementary pairs...
that matter, but also all the stuff and all the action falling in between them. (p. 3)

Kelso and Engstrom see contraries as being ubiquitous, or omnipresent, since they exist in all aspects of life. In fact, they state that it is literally impossible to express anything without using contraries. “No matter where the search begins for answers to our deepest questions, all roads lead inexorably to the subject of contraries, of conflicting opposites” (p. 5). In fact, they see dichotomizing as “central to the human condition” which would seem to support Kretchmar’s points on the Darwinian roots of dichotomous thought, which will be discussed in greater length later in this chapter.

Kelso and Engstrom also state that complementary pairs move and are dynamic in nature. It is here in this last quality of complementary pairs that we see the core of their theory, which touches upon some of the key points of this dissertation in bringing together Zen Buddhist and Western conceptual traditions.

In Buddhist terminology, skandas come together, persist, change, and fall apart. New wine in old bottles? No. The new message has to do with how this actually happens. It is one thing to correctly intuit that nature is fundamentally dynamical, and quite another to scientifically identify the actual nature of its dynamics. (p. 8)

They continue by stressing this continual dynamic state of movement, or change, a conception that is not present in the roots of much Western thought.

. . . we suggest that the limitations of many ingenious efforts to understand complementary pairs and their dynamics might be readily overcome by adopting a rather unconventional “dynamic middle-ground” approach. Plato, for instance, valorized form over change, and Descartes mind over body. One of the main messages
is that we cannot afford to stick to the common assumptions central to the mutually exclusive mentality that has so dominated Western science and thought, especially in the latter part of the twentieth century. (p. 8)

They see the dynamic middle-ground of complementary pairs to be evident in what they label as “coordination dynamics,” meaning the “concepts, methods, and tools of information based, self-organizing dynamical systems (p. 8).

Kelso and Engstrom state that one of the main reasons humans dichotomize their world (which Kelso and Engstrom actually see as complementary pairs) is because the nonlinear property of bistability can be found in neurons in the human brain and has been documented in empirical observations in much of human behavior. Bistability “means that two or more dynamically stable states of a system can coexist for exactly the same parameter values,” which means that polar opposites are merely the ends of an ever moving dynamic state that exists between the “dualism” and to which there are no differences in value of the varying degrees of the bistability (p. 8). In other words, there is a larger “whole” state that encompasses the two dynamically stable states within the system.

Much of the first half of Kelso and Engstrom’s book on the complementary nature of reality simply reinforces the claim that complementary pairs have been found in the world from the beginning of both Western and Eastern thought. They pound this home by referring to numerous scientists, theologians, artists, political theorists, and philosophers who endorsed this concept. The latter half of the book shows how the minute details of the laws of physics support the existence of complementary pairs in nature. Again, the argument is advanced that not only the physical structure of the brain,
but also the laws of physics at the particle-wave level support the concept of a complementary nature. So there is a clear connection between the physical and mental realms to support the gray area between all complementary pairs in the universe. From particles to ideas, the more faithful description of reality and experience may lie in the notion of complementary pairs.

Kelso and Engstrom would endorse Prokhovnik’s analysis of supposed dichotomous relationships between man/woman and reason/emotion as complementary pairs and not exclusionary opposites. However, Prokhovnik also sees some bistable continuum in these dualisms in her expressed preference for the both/and rather than the either/or in the linguistic framework of the Western philosophical tradition.

Dichotomies such as reason/emotion and man/woman represent fundamental polarities, fixed deep within Western philosophy and reflected in the structures of our language. The two polarities also represent two expressions of hierarchical power relations expressed in the social practices in patriarchal society. . . . This book explores the idea that ‘rational woman’, formed linguistically from the valued element of the reason/emotion dichotomy bracketed with the ‘other’, subordinate, element of the man/woman dichotomy, invites a reconceptualization of both sets of terms, to express not just a plausible idea but a coherent and fruitful conjunction. (Prokhovnik, 2002, p. 1)

So it is the dynamic “conjunction” that represents a moveable point within the bistability of the man/woman and reason/emotion complementary pairs that matters, even though Prokhovnik never expressly employs the concept of complementary nature. It would seem that Prokhovnik and Kelso and Engstrom are pointing in a common direction. From their comprehensive examinations of complementary nature and a feminist critique of dichotomy we may be able to find useful ways to reframe the winning/losing dualism. It is possible that Kretchmar’s point-counterpoint opposition by
scale could represent both a range of bistability between winning and losing, as well as a point of conjunction between winning and losing, a dynamic conjunction that has variable placement along the axis of the point-counterpoint positions. No matter how one might interpret the win vs. lose dichotomy, it is imperative to see the complementary nature in order to overlay a Zen Buddhist philosophy in how to approach the competitive nature of sport.

**Darwinian Roots of Dichotomous Thought**

One of the foundations of this dissertation is the assertion that humans may be hard-wired to dichotomous either-or thinking as adaptive for survival in a Darwinian sense. Dichotomies may have played an important role in the lives of humans as they evolved from a pre-historic state to what they are today. Kretchmar argued that it was adaptive for our ancestors to be able to categorize the world dichotomously (Kretchmar, 2007, December, p. 269). In other words, the strength of survival was partially based on humans being able to dichotomize the world into such things as friend vs. foe, or hot vs. cold, or even male vs. female. It was a way to make quick, precise decisions when faced with possible life-threatening situations such as presented to the hunter and the hunted. Kretchmar explains:

…I am compelled by arguments from philosophical anthropology to the effect that our minds do not ‘come from nowhere’. That is, what we think, how we think and what we are capable of understanding is tethered to our evolutionary history and the kinds of problems that were solved by our ancestors . . . . this bears directly on our tendencies to dichotomise reality and our difficulties in reconciling apparently exclusionary contraries such as mind and body, realism and relativism. (Kretchmar cited in Morgan & Meier, 1995, p. 269)
Kretchmar bases this theory on Darwinian thought. Indeed, as scientists continue to discover more evidence in support of Darwin’s notions of natural and sexual selection -- for example, when Darwin stated that “all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth have descended from some one primordial form,” he was really just making a calculated guess based on his observations of various life forms and how he saw them evolving -- it is now a real possibility that Darwin’s theories also applied to the evolution of the human mind and how it reasons (Ridley, 2009, p. 58). It is possible that in order to survive humans began to think in survival-promoting ways. One of these may have been simplification through dichotomization.

There are other good reasons why humans lean on dichotomizing as a way to frame the world. For example, when trying to teach children moral rights and wrongs, it is often best to paint the world in black and white with no room for a gray area for the children to question or to become confused. This approach is often used when trying to teach children about how to avoid danger in the world so it is very clear to the child that running into a street is dangerous, and staying off the street is safe. It is simple, dichotomous, and has no room for gray area that might confuse the child. Adults often revert to the comfort of a childlike world that is precise in its dichotomies. Therefore, dichotomous thought becomes somewhat of a psychological tool in helping humans cope with the reality that much of what they encounter in life is a miasma of gray that they must muddle through with their own uncertain moral compass.

Kretchmar argues that Darwinism suggests that humans’ minds evolved in such a way as to portray the world around them in dualisms, and that humans’ minds may not have physically evolved to cope successfully with resolution of polar opposites.
What if we are so constructed as to make dichotomous thinking unusually attractive and the reconciliation of opposites particularly difficult? And what if these structures and tendencies that were once adaptive are now, at least occasionally, maladaptive? In other words, what if they helped our ancestors (more often than not) but get us into trouble (more often than not)? The very possibility of affirmative answers to these questions should give us pause. (Kretchmar cited in Morgan & Meier, 1995, p. 277)

Indeed, dichotomization also has its weaknesses. Humans’ intellectual capabilities were not suited for figuring out how to reconcile what appeared to be mutually exclusive dichotomies. A prime example is the mutually exclusive dichotomy of mind vs. body. Humans do not seem to have the intellectual hardware and software to figure out how these things go together and, in truth, are not exclusive. They seem so radically different; it is hard to see how they interpenetrate one another. The polarization in American politics is another, and very current, example. Certainly, the political philosophies of all Americans are not so conveniently packaged into Republican vs. Democrat or right vs. left, but Americans’ ability to function politically appears to be at an historic low with those who support polar opposites refusing to find any semblance of common ground for the common good. Again, the human brain may not be hard-wired to come to reconciliation of these polar opposites, and this inability has allowed political rhetoric to get out of control. Likewise, humans may not have the intellectual wherewithal to figure out how winning and losing are compatible – that they actually interpenetrate one another, as indeed, the Eastern approach would suggest is the case.

Another indication that dichotomization may be an outdated way of thinking is uncovered when realizing that the world does not often break down into two distinct parts, but rather into threes, fours or other arrangements. Some sociological phenomena
cannot be explained effectively when using the simplicity of duality. Racism is based on a number of dichotomies, including black vs. white. Likewise sexual preferences are dichotomized between heterosexual vs. homosexual. Certain immigrants are identified as citizens vs. not citizens. None of these distinctions, for many thoughtful individuals, are entirely accurate or useful. It is interesting, however, that complex social issues that have occupied so much of the national debate in the latter half of the last century, and thus far in this century, have consistently been converted to debates over two dichotomous options. Again, we see strong support for the possibility that the human mind quite possibly is now hard-wired to see the world in either-or terms, and, conversely, hard-wired with an inability to reconcile dichotomous opposites. In other words, human intellectual capability is not suited for figuring out how to reconcile what appear to be mutually exclusive dichotomies.

As the history of Western culture saw the decline of illiteracy and as access to books spread to more people with the invention of moveable type, the need to paint the world into two dichotomous halves grew stronger. It is interesting to view the slow permeation of dichotomous thought -- that increased as industrialization took hold -- that seemed to become that afore-mentioned psychological coping mechanism used by Western societies to soothe the stresses of modernization. Now, in the midst of a digital revolution, that seems to be pushing the human mind into information overload, and increasing the need to see the world in two simple dichotomous parts. Nowhere is this more evident than in the activity of sport viewership and sport participation that thrives on the clear-cut winning vs. losing dichotomy in sporting contests.
Sport may be the home of one of the more poignant dichotomies—that of winning vs. losing. This dichotomy tracks well with our needs inside and outside sport. It is consistent with the world around us, one that calls for not just winners in games, but winners in the areas of politics, economics, science, and even philanthropy. There are very few areas in modern Western societies that allow for neutral contemplation that do not cause a person to see the world in some form of a dualistic state. This need for a world of either vs. or, have vs. have not, win vs. lose, wealth vs. poverty, and no in between, has always been a part of Western thought and is simply driven to greater dichotomous extremes as the swirling world of 24/7 media, jobs, and multi-tasking drive the philosophical engine.

Social Darwinism and Its Roots of Dichotomization

The importance of Darwinism to understanding the win vs. lose dichotomy has been discussed earlier, and, for that matter, man’s tendency to see the world in dualism and why that might be ingrained in the evolutionary process. However, Social Darwinism brings a different dimension to this topic. Social Darwinism is defined in Bullock and Stallybrass’ *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1977) as:

The application of the concept of evolution to the historical development of human societies which lays particular emphasis on ‘the struggle for existence’ and ‘the survival of the fittest’. Though not rooted in Darwinism (the idea preceded publication of the *Origin of the Species*) such theories had a great popular vogue in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when they were applied to the rivalries of the Great Powers and provided a pseudo-biological justification for power politics, imperialism, and war. Hitler picked up these ideas in Vienna before 1914 and made them a feature of Nazism. (pp. 578-579)
Social Darwinism helped lay the foundation for seeing the world through the lens of survive vs. die, or put differently, fit vs. not fit. Whereas, Darwinism is the “theory of how evolution might have come about” due to physical/biological changes over vast amounts of time (p. 154). This grand Social Darwinian dichotomy of survive vs. not survive (die) because a person is fit vs. not fit is played out every day in modern sporting events. The best athletes are anxiously pitted against each other to see who ultimately comes out the winner (struggles to exist over the loser) by, ultimately, being the fittest of the two competitors or teams. The drama of sport, particularly team sports, mirrors Social Darwinism’s application to the “exist vs. not exist” dichotomous rivalries that were a part of each stage of social and political historical development (kingdoms/serfdoms evolved into nation/states or dictatorships through many wars in the West).

It could be argued that this backdrop of Social Darwinism helps explain why the intense fan team identity of the billion-dollar professional team sports in the United States (as well as in college sports) is really just a psychological extension of the historical human society rivalries, whose evolution is explained by Social Darwinism.

Kretchmar, it could be argued, takes a Social Darwinism approach to the limitations of analytical thinking, by citing Gould who claims that the early stages of our ancestors’ development was a non-reflective state based on the need to survive and which may have led to a “rapid either-or approach to life” and, thus, laid the physical foundations for our tendency to dichotomize fit vs. not fit, or survive vs. die (Kretchmar, 2007, p. 277).
As the twenty-first century world turns more to one of survival, one can see that Social Darwinism may further reinforce man’s tendencies for duality as a framework that partly defines the fittest. The need to escape into the “safe” theater of sports to play out these battles of physical fitness with the winners being the most fit (therefore, surviving), may only grow as the world becomes more stressful and filled, as it is, with frightening news of climate change, impending catastrophes that threaten all of mankind, as well as too few resources for an ever-growing world population. One can see how the simplicity of Social Darwinism’s dichotomous “survive vs. not survive” because competitors are “fittest vs. not fittest” lends itself well to the exponential change of post-modernity.

It is important to fully recognize why humans gravitate towards competition and the psychological need for competition that may be innate to the dichotomous nature of the human condition, which may be hard-wired according to both the more scientific Darwinian concepts of the evolutionary process of all living species, and the more sociological concept of Social Darwinism. If this were not acknowledged it would weaken any defense of the hypothesis.

Conclusion

To apply the philosophy of Zen Buddhism to winning, and especially to the under-researched area of losing, it is essential that it first be established that satisfaction and definition of self is derived from competition and that competition permeates all aspects of our lives, with sport being one mirror of that need. To understand the hyper emphasis on winning vs. losing in Western philosophy, it is important to see there is an economic value in dichotomously-framed competition, even in kids’ sport. ESPN
televises the Little League World Series, the Pop Warner Football Championship, and even high school football and basketball. Competition can be the source of motivation, a driving passion for achievement, and Western philosophy has often suggested that genuine competition requires a win vs. lose dichotomous framework. It can represent dueling battles within societies that have been the source of philosophic debate for centuries. It also serves as a venue to express more dangerous competitions -- such as war, societal challenges of imbalances between race, gender and age, and battles in the workplace -- that have no other outlet in a civil society.

Competition has risen to a hyper level in the twenty-first century and comes in many forms, whether it be opposition between two identities, opposition (including opposition by degree and opposition by cut), hierarchical ordering of the pair, or two positions in a dichotomous pair become the only two options available to sum up and define a whole, and finally, by transcendence. It is the extreme hyper level of these variants of dualistic and dichotomous thought that has dominated all rival approaches to sport. As noted, this brings with it dangers such as temptation to corruption, extreme value claims, abuse of the body and mind, and a warped sense within society that winners are good and losers have no value. Our whole approach to sport is ripe for reformation. This is why it is important to examine Zen Buddhist philosophies as one potential resource to use in such reformations. By applying Zen philosophy to how to approach and value sport, new conceptual possibilities arise that can replace or complement current thinking. The next chapter will examine, in Western terms, why the inherent complexity of sport requires such a reformation.
Chapter 3

The Complexity of Competition and Associated Meanings

“Competition” : Com-petition, to strive or question together . . . The etymology of “competition” points first to the element of cooperation involved, that something is being done together, and second, to the element of a striving or questioning toward something that presumably one does not already have. (Hyland, 1984, p. 64)

Introduction

Each spring and summer, as children in countless communities throughout the United States play in baseball games where a parent or other relative is not able to attend, the children are often asked when they arrive home from the game, “Did you win?” This is a simple question, but one that is inadequate for probing the myriad of possibilities at hand, but it is a way for the parent to say, “I am interested.” However, given the specificity of the question, that interest would seem to be limited to winning vs. losing. It suggests that winning, regardless of the quality of the game’s actions or other variables, is what truly matters. It also reinforces to the child the notion that the only other thing that matters is losing. Losing is the competitive outcome that must be avoided.

Sports, and ultimately the outcomes of these events, are too broad and complex to be captured by reference to simple dichotomies. Winning is described as success and losing as a failure without fully considering the process that took place to reach these ends and the many variables that affect that process. How exactly an athlete achieved those ends and what transpired between the start and the finish would seem to be
important and provide a much better description of the affair. Yet, focus is most often placed on that singular end result – those two words “we won” or “we lost.”

This chapter will argue that using the simple dichotomy of victory vs. defeat cannot adequately capture sporting results. This argument will be supported by examining two fundamental elements that are found in sporting activity—namely, testing and contesting activity. To be sure, the results of both testing and contesting behavior can be described in dichotomous language. For example, we commonly say that we passed a test or failed it, and, as noted, we also say that we won a game or lost it. However, by examining the multiple meanings found in both testing and contesting, and by looking at a variety of contingencies that impact these two kinds of activities, it will be shown in this chapter that dichotomous reports of results are inadequate or misleading, at best, or simply wrong, at worst.

The Nature of Sporting Tests

The problem in creating artificial or conventional tests is finding the right state of affairs that grabs our interest and keeps it. As Bernard Suits (1980) points out in his book *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*, rule makers manipulate rules to create an artificial test and a specific environment in which the test will occur. This environment indicates where we can and cannot go, what we can and cannot do, at what level we must contain our angry outbursts, and the role of officiating within the test. We, as the test takers, accept this state of affairs as a precondition for participating in the test.

The test itself requires a balance of means and ends that point toward an achievable outcome that is nevertheless problematic. In other words, the test itself cannot
be too easy nor can it be too hard. If it is too easy, something that anyone can 
accomplish, then there is no drama in the outcome, and it does not genuinely test much of 
anything. If the stated test is too difficult, something that no one can accomplish, then 
again there is no drama and it will not provide us with much information. In effect, when 
a “test” is either too easy or too hard, little or nothing gets tested.

Experience*, describes this state of affairs between impossibility and facility. He calls it a 
flow zone, and points out that this middle area is where the athlete wants to be. If a test is 
too hard relative to the athlete’s skill level, as illustrated in table 3.1 on the following 
page, then the athlete experiences increased levels of anxiety. However, if a test is too 
easy in relationship to the athlete’s capabilities, then boredom ensues.
Table 3.1 Test Chart

When an athlete is above the flow zone, challenges overwhelm skills. The athlete becomes anxious, frustrated and avoids the test. Trying to jump over 30-foot-high wall either alone or before anyone else does so becomes an exercise in futility and, after a few tries, the athlete moves on. It becomes obvious that utter failure is the only outcome available. The athlete becomes anxious and disinterested. Again, when a test is too challenging to the point of being impossible or excessively difficult, the athlete becomes increasingly anxious in its presence. The physical challenge repels rather than attracts.

On the other end of the spectrum are those tests that can be solved one hundred percent of the time or nearly so. A test to see if a person can breathe would not make much of a test, and therefore, we would quickly become bored. As a normal function of life, tests of normal breathing appear to be too easy. Csikszentmihalyi points out that in
these cases we become bored because the test is not sufficiently problematic; the outcome
is never in doubt, so we quickly move on to other projects. Thus, a good test blends
difficulty with possibility and thereby reduces the likelihood of experiencing boredom
and anxiety. In short, we do not want tests to be too easy or too hard.

Once we have a good test we encounter what Kretchmar refers to as opposition by
cut, usually in reference to a criterion level. The cut, as experienced by the test taker,
creates uncertainty. The outcome is reachable, but it is problematic. There is the right
degree of being possible with just enough difficulty to make the outcome questionable
and thus interesting. This question of “Can I or can’t I?” creates the drama that captures
an athlete’s attention. Given this specific state of affairs athletes are unsure of their
ability to accomplish the challenge, but they want to try. The test invites them to stretch
their abilities and to gain knowledge of their capabilities.

In order to find out what we are capable of, we create these artificial experiences
and conventions. As Suits points out, we create, through constitutive rules, ways to test
our abilities. We stipulate relationships, create space, and dictate specific movements.
The rules explain how to take the test and delineate the possible outcomes. We accept
these conventions and step into the artificial world they create to find out if we are
capable of solving the dilemma that is in front of us. We understand our success or
failure only within the framework provided.

Sporting tests also have regulative rules. Regulative rules are rules of nature and
rules of physics. Examples are things such as “what goes up must come down.” A game
test cannot avoid a reliance on regulative rules. To create a rule within sport that does not
honor the laws of nature, for instance, would be to create a humanly irrelevant test. The
test would undoubtedly become too hard or too easy and its goal would either never be achievable or always be achievable. Good game wrights, therefore, not only develop artificial tests, they have to rely on natural tests and testing conditions in order to develop them effectively.

Sporting tests, in contrast to other kinds of challenges, concern themselves principally with physical ability. We as the test takers want to know the boundaries of our physical skill, strength, speed, coordination, and all other manner of physical expertise. This is a physical exercise in that we are looking to test the realm of physical capabilities. We live in this body or, perhaps more accurately, from this body and want to find out what we embodied creatures can do. What are we capable of lifting? How far can we run? What physical challenges can we overcome? These questions provide us with motivation to test ourselves specifically in sporting ways.

However, we also understand we are not purely physical beings. We mix physical opportunity with outcomes that can be determined by rational choices among possible courses of action and strategy (Loy, 2002, p. 20). This mental process juxtaposed to the physical process adds complexity to the situation. In addition to physical and strategic tests, we also encounter luck or chance events, where the outcome is affected by guesses or uncontrolled artifacts (p. 20). Luck, much like skill and strategy, adds potentially interesting dimensions to the problem and drama of the task at hand.

Virtually all sporting activities have all three elements in differing blends. While strategy and chance are involved, the focus in sport still remains on testing physical
capabilities. With these clarifications of sporting tests in hand, we can now look at the various complexities found in these activities.

**Test Variations and Related Meanings**

When we enter the test and produce a given outcome, we can ask what that result means. Of course, those who take tests want to know the answer to one fundamental question: How well did I do? While answers to that question would seem to be readily available in most testing formats, the situation is more complex than that. Obviously, testing ourselves is designed to give us some form of evidence of our physical capabilities and mental stamina needed to reach those capabilities, but how do we translate the outcome into evidence of our ability to be successful in the test? An outcome is the end result of taking the test, but it may not be inherently meaningful. What meaning can we derive, for example, from our first experience with a test and its resultant score, and is meaning enhanced with each subsequent testing experience? What if test forms are different? How are we to compare scores?

We, as the test takers, are interested in discerning as much information as possible from each test. We want to know as much as we can about our capabilities on that test and our prospects on future tests. More simply put, the test taker is the one who is most likely to want to understand the results of the test, particularly as it relates to the question: How well did I do?

We can start by examining meanings available from an initial test result. We can picture a person shooting basketball for the first time. This individual takes 20 foul shots and is attempting to make as many shots as possible. The shooter has never done this
before, and is utterly unaware of anyone else having tried this feat, so the shooter proceeds on the basis of this fairly uncluttered standpoint. If the individual makes 10 of the attempts, that is certainly an outcome, but it is not really clear what information can be derived from this. And it certainly does not answer the question: How well did I do? This is so because little meaning is generated from this singular testing outcome. The test taker has no comparative information from which to decipher the result. There are no previous data against which to understand individual progression or improvement. There are no data on others’ success at the same task. Are 10 shots made the highest the shooter is capable of achieving? How far can the test taker go on the spectrum of possibilities? In short, the single score—even though it stands as a valid and clear testing result—offers very little information on the foundational question of “How well did I do?” The person who took the foul shooting test is left with little knowledge other than the bare fact of hitting 10 free throws out of a possible 20.

A second step in the testing progression might have the test taker repeat the test. Once this individual has duplicated the test, he or she is presented with a new data point. This point provides information on the progression/regression of the performance. This provides new and helpful information. It still says relatively little about how well the individual performed, but it does indicate testing advances, stasis, or regression. “I did better, the same, or worse,” the test-taker can surmise. Test results take on new meaning, albeit limited in nature. Individuals can begin to understand the changes and possible improvements from test one to test two. If they continue to take the test over and over, they can begin to map their improvement. A larger database begins to form a picture of the possibility of outcomes. With each new test the test taker has a better idea of where
that original 10 free throws falls in the spectrum of human possibility and how each new outcome compares with previous tries.

With multiple individual testing, there is some additional context, however limited, that is gained. The test taker begins to see his or her improvement over time. However, with no outside reference point to use for the sake of comparisons with the larger human community, this meaning may still have little value. An example Simon (2010) provides in his book *Fair Play The Ethics of Sport* is an illustration from Robert Nozick of a villager on a remote island shooting jump shots. This villager practices and practices and can hit 15 out of 150 shots (pp. 29-30). He thinks, as do the other villagers because they can only hit a few, that this is a great accomplishment because it is the highest number produced by anyone in the village. In fact, no one else on the island can make five out of 150. Thus his reference, while limited to the ability of other villagers on the island, seems to support this conclusion. Then, notes Simon, Jerry West, a former NBA star, comes along. This provides additional context for interpreting the islander’s testing marks. As a result, his accomplishment does not seem so significant anymore. Additional testing reference points provided additional meaning.

This third step in enhancing testing meaning comes from the Jerry West example of entering the island free throw scene. By testing together, we introduce another possibility of extracting test score meaning. If we test alongside one or more partners, we gain some interpretive context for our own experience. However, a person only gains a minimal understanding of where he or she fits in with the total possibilities because the person is still unsure of what the total possibilities are.
The best answers to testing questions of “How well did I do?” may require norms. These norms would be based on a large number and ways to accurately compare test takers (e.g., by age, gender, experience level, and so on) as well as testing conditions (e.g., indoors or outdoors, with stiff rims or not, and the like). To gain a richer sense of their capabilities they would be aware of and test against this norm. To have a full understanding of the meaning of their score they must have an understanding of what the larger group of testers is capable of. To understand a score of 10 we need to know the range and frequency of each outcome. The range from zero to 20 describes the possibilities, but a person wants to understand their score in relationship to achievement of others in order to make a meaningful comparison and to also have a fully informed self-understanding. If nine out of 10 test takers hit 12 or more free throws then a person’s score of 10 does not look so good. However, if seven out of 10 hit eight or fewer then the person’s relative ability rises.

Also, this is not an abstract comparison. A person is curious not only about their place in relationship to all test takers, but those who are like them—those who are the same gender, age, and level of experience.

It is important to note that we have not yet moved into the realm of contesting. Comparing, per se, is not the same as contesting. This can be seen by observing that, for example, no contest takes place between participants when one is not trying to outdo the other and vice versa. Two test takers who compare scores are not competing, but rather are using the information to understand their relative status vis-à-vis the other test takers. The results are simple comparisons, which allow us, depending on the validity, breadth, and detail of the norms, to have a richer understanding of our own testing competence.
A fourth and possibly final step in the enrichment of testing meaning approaches the domain of the contest. It might, in fact, be called a pseudo contest. In this type of test we commit ourselves to performing as well as we can and to try to perform better than other test takers. This is superior to comparisons with simple norms because we now control for intent or purpose. In effect, we are looking for norms for those with similar intent in relationship to solving testing problems. This may sound like a contest. However, as described in the second part of this chapter, the full parameters of contesting are not in place. Two general vehicles for pseudo-contesting arise: simultaneous comparative testing on different venues and sequential comparative testing at a single venue.

Comparative testing at different venues might work as follows: I know that you are playing golf at Pebble Beach in California tomorrow afternoon. I am playing the Blue course at Pennsylvania State University tomorrow morning, so I offer to try to better your score and you offer to try to better mine. We both play our courses and get in touch the evening after we have completed our rounds. We compare scores.

Difficulties, however, are encountered in comparing these scores. While golf tries to simplify these comparisons by providing course ratings, each course can still play quite differently. One par five can be particularly challenging, often leading to a bogey, while another may allow for players to arrive at the green in two shots and play for an eagle or a birdie. Pebble Beach is on the ocean and, in the afternoon, often has daunting winds with which to contend. Penn State offers no such challenges. The layout of each course is different and each offer different sand and water traps that change the skills needed to be successful at each course. Pebble Beach needs more control to be exhibited in the shot
taking rather than a “grip it and rip it” mentality. Weather conditions, course conditions, playing speed on the course, and a whole slew of other factors impact how each arrived at his or her score. These variables complicate our ability to gain an idea of testing comparisons. How well did we do? How well did we do in comparison? It is hard to say because, in effect, we took two different tests.

Another possibility for testing comparisons allows that we both play the same course but at different times. Once again we try to assure norm comparability by agreeing to play as well as we can. Let us further assume that the course conditions were identical for the two players during time A and time B. Their concern is to understand “How well did I play? And this produces norms for like test takers. Once again, it controls for intent. I intend to try my hardest to pass the golfing test, and pass it with the best score possible. When both make that commitment, and when all scores in the norm table are from like test takers, then the information base becomes richer. My own score means more. Not only did I do X in relationship to the norms; the norms are for golfers who took the same golfing test with the same intent as me. Can we say these individuals were contesting? That is, were they moving from normal comparisons that might show greater or lesser success to competitive, zero-sum outcomes that produce winners and losers?

It can be argued that they were not. Contesting would seem to require knowledge of an opponent’s progress relative to one’s own. One plays their shot or strategizes how to play at a given time not only based on one’s own expectations but also based on the idea that this individual is trying to outperform the opponent. How I play will be impacted by your score and vice-a-versa. Your poor play may allow me to be
conservative, but your good play may force me to take risks. While I want to be successful in the test, I also want to be successful in the contest. Because the latter success matters, we both will be impacted by the play of the other.

In this hypothetical case such competitive influences were not in play. Because we played at separate times with no knowledge of the other’s score, arguably we were not actually contesting, or at least not contesting in the full sense of that term. In fact, scoring norms include those who were not trying to outdo others and the scores may well reflect a diminished possibility. While we may gain some meaning from comparing scores from a small number of testers and have a minimal sense of how we played that day there is little or no complete comparative meaning. In both of these cases we lack the knowledge gained when we formally contest with the other. We fall short of gaining significant comparable meaning of our testing ability and no meaning from the standpoint of a contest.

Test Contingencies and Related Meanings

We have seen that comparisons of testing results provide gradations for meanings related to the foundational question of “How well did I do?” These varied meanings are sufficient on their own to be cautious about any simplistic rendition of testing success—that is, simplistic dichotomous renditions like passing vs. failing. Meanings associated with success are shown to grow and otherwise vary under different comparative conditions. Any claim of passing or failing without an understanding of this evolution of meaning would be premature, misleading, or both.

But these varied meanings are complicated by yet other contingencies. While a person tries to gain knowledge of their testing capabilities, numerous additional factors...
often frustrate their ability to compare scores, times, or data points. Too often success or failure cannot be easily or unambiguously discerned from the end point or final score. Capabilities can be masked and superior performance, or lack thereof, may be hidden. While gaining accurate information on how well we did may be our primary goal, contingencies such as luck, error, manipulations and a myriad of other factors may hide the actual merits of a performance.

**Discrepancies of measurement.** One factor that raises the difficulty of comparison is discrepancies of measurement. An inability to accurately measure testing achievement is a foundational problem that can be found, to one extent or another, in virtually every sporting context. It is not unusual to see clearly dominant performances rendered inaccurately by close scores. Low scoring and thus low-variability testing conditions, in particular, have a tendency to mis-measure achievement.

A recent high school soccer match in Ithaca, New York, offers an example of one such case. The final score was 1-0 with the winning team scoring their goal in the 66th minute off a long shot. The score gives the perception that this was an even, hard-fought battle with both sides exhibiting similar levels of testing achievement. However, this was not the case. One team, recognizing the superiority of the other, packed in all 11 players on the defensive end of the field. In effect, they completely ignored half of the test – the offensive side – in hopes of creating a competitive outcome more favorable to their side, even if it was nil to nil. This team had only one scoring chance all game, gained on a deflected pass that created a break away that was ultimately deflected away from the goal. Over 90 percent of the contest was played at one end of the field. One team
showed excellent soccer skill in their ability to pass, cover the ball, and control possession. However, there was arguably a clear discrepancy between their achievement, on the one hand, and the score of the game, on the other.

In short, they displayed far superior skill, but that testing superiority was not represented in the final score. This discrepancy between the score and the actual excellence displayed was not representative of actual differences. This soccer tactic, in addition to stalling and other unusual strategies used in the quest to win-at-all-costs, effectively frustrates testing and its measurement. In low-variability, low-scoring games it would seem that contest scores are not always reliable indicators of testing superiority. Some surrogate in addition to goals-scored would seem to be warranted, that is, if sport is to provide reliable and accurate testing information.

**Differences in closed and open tests.** Another complication in the interpretation of test results emerges from differences in the structure of two kinds of tests—often called closed and open tests. Open tests present the most difficulties for interpretation. An open test is where athletes test their skills to score baskets, but do so against the opposition, defense, and other testing difficulties provided by another agent. The athletes’ skill or success is thus determined by their ability to overcome the variable obstacles provided by their particular opponent and to score baskets in spite of those challenges.

By way of contrast, a closed test presents fixed hurdles or obstacles. The testing problem is a function of the relatively unchanged environment and the means allowed by the rules for solving that problem. For example, when a person bowls with the intent to knock down as many pins as possible, the person does so with no outside interference.
Testing conditions from one event to the next are similar, even in some activities, close to identical.

In an open test one would think that the highest possible score in relation to the other would show a high degree of excellence. However, this is ambiguous at best and often hides the fact that it may have been achieved against a bad test. Our score is relative to the merits of the test taker participating with us. For example, a few years ago in Texas a sensation was created by a girls’ high school basketball score. The final tally was 100-0. It would appear that one team achieved a high level of success. To score 100 points in a 32-minute game while holding your opposition to zero appears to be a clear-cut example of the highest excellence one could achieve in an open test. However, when considering the relative ineptitude of the weaker team, it is fair to ask if a legitimate test was actually in place.

The facts of the case would suggest that it was not. The team that scored 100 points was one of the top private programs in the state. Their opponent was a small school for the disabled. While the disabilities of the players were attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other learning challenges, only one player of the eight-member team had any significant experience playing basketball prior to enrolling in that school. The losing squad failed to get the ball over half court into their offensive end until the final two minutes of the game. Upon reaching 100 points, the winning team called off the full court press defense. This allowed the opposing team to at least cross half court, but they still did not get off a shot. Was this an actual test of skills for the winning team? While the score makes it appear
they played well, the lack of skill by their opposition complicates interpretation of final score for assessing testing ability.

Another concern with interpreting the results in open tests can be seen in the statistics that are often used to assess the perceived skilled play of individual athletes. A football quarterback, for instance, has an outstanding game completing 21 of 30 passes, a 70 percent completion rate, with three touchdown receptions. However, a few weeks later his squad plays the same team and the quarterback completes only 14 of 28 passes – a 50 percent completion rate – with one touchdown. The media wants to know why the quarterback had such a bad performance against a defense he had shredded earlier in the season. The quarterback, however, actually judges the second performance as the better of the two. He points out that the defensive coordinator of the other team used different schemes to limit his team’s passing game. They had studied films and used that knowledge to defend against his tendencies. They blitzed more and, thus, put more pressure on him to get rid of the ball before he wanted to, and several of the opposing players had the best games of their careers. Given these adverse conditions the quarterback believed that the second game, while statistically the lesser of the two, was his better performance. Test scores in terms of percentage of passes completed turned out to be misleading.

Even closed tests have variability. Bowling is an example of a closed test where how one bowls can be impacted by a great number of factors outside the bowler’s control. For example, there is a difference between synthetic and wood lanes. A bowler who is used to playing one type can be hindered when switching to the other. Even if a person frequently bowls on wood lanes, minor changes can have significant impact on
scoring. Oil patterns, temperature settings, and pin action can all impact how the ball carries down the lane and the number of pins knocked down by each shot.

For both closed and open tests weather can also impact performance. As anyone who has played or watched golf can attest, playing a course in the morning versus the afternoon can be significantly different. Pebble Beach in California is a perfect example. In the summer, most mornings have no wind, the course is wet from the night’s dew, and it is likely foggy. Sometimes the fog is so thick it is impossible to see more than 100 feet or so. These conditions, elements that provide clear testing complications, are quite different from those encountered during the afternoon. Most days the afternoon sees 20-to 40-mile-per-hour breezes that blow in from the ocean sporadically going crossways across most holes. On a few of the holes, the player hits directly into this wind or even goes with the wind toward the holes, changing the club length of how they play. The sun usually shines and burns off the fog and dew on the course. Once the greens dry out it makes it more difficult to stop approach shots, increasing the likelihood of a higher score.

Other forms of weather can impact both open and closed tests. Weather such as rain, wind, snow and ice can wreak havoc on skilled play. Slippery and windy conditions can impact the ability to throw a ball, to catch a ball, or even to run down a field. Games played on ice, most notably hockey and curling, can be impacted by temperature variations that can change the surface at times slowing the skaters and/or stones and pucks. All these conditions can impact performance and the skills shown. They can close the gap between skills of opponents, thereby rendering testing statistics, victories, and defeats ambiguous.
Impact of luck and chance. Another contingency in tests that creates difficulty in indentifying skilled play is how luck and chance impact outcomes. As Simon (2010) points out in his book *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport*, “Competition in sports is supposed to be a test of the athletic ability of persons” (p. 83). If this is the case, how does a person deal with the factors of luck and chance, in sport? Frans De Wachter (1985) describes chance as “an event that is not produced by the intended actions of the interacting opponents, not by what they accomplish out of their own skill, strength, or effort” (p. 53). Luck has been defined as “an unknown or unpredictable phenomenon that causes an event to result one way rather than another” (“WolframAlpha,” 2012). As Dixon points out, unlucky losers, and thereby lucky winners, are a result of failed contests. There is no clear picture of achievement when luck or chance impacts the outcome.

Chance and luck are inherent in most test and contests, therefore, it is important to understand the relationship, or role, of chance and luck in a test or contest. Games are designed as tests of skills, but they also have chance and luck built into them. Games have varying degrees of luck built into them and each game embraces this reality differently. Football is a sport greatly dependent on luck and chance from the coin flip to start games and overtimes to the basic shape of the football. The oval shape allows for greater variability in bounce when a team fumbles the ball to the ground. A round ball would give a more predictable bounce. However, the penalty for fumbling is the inability to predict where the ball will end up, as well as the difficulty in trying to possess it once it begins to move in an unpredictable fashion.

A sport that relies less on luck and chance is sprinting. This sport is more focused on the physical act and provides less opportunity for luck/chance. However, no matter
how much a game focuses on skill, the game test still has some chance/luck in it. The lane a person draws, to slipping at the start, are still concerns for the racer. While these possibilities are less of a factor, when they do happen it provides others to question the validity of the test.

In these cases where luck/chance have impacted the outcome, the winner or loser cannot take full credit or responsibility for their success or failure. This would seem to harm games and raise the question of why rule committees and other overseers of games have not eliminated chance from their respective sports. By eliminating chance/luck they could put the test back on the purely physical aspect, a true test of physical ability.

Apart from the fact that it would be very difficult to eliminate chance altogether, many sport participants and fans would not want to do so. This is so because repeated contests would make less sense. In a pure meritocracy there would be little or no reason to test ourselves again against an opponent who was superior or inferior. Once we determined who was most skilled, there would be little reason to test against them in the future. If skill was the determining factor, and skills had not changed, then the question of who is better at the test would already be settled. There would be no drama as to the outcome, no reason to test again. Our sporting tests, therefore, allow for -- and in some cases actually depend upon -- luck/chance to create drama. This drama is undoubtedly one of the reasons we enjoy testing. Sporting games arguably should be focused on skill, but they should also allow luck/chance and other factors to affect outcomes so that hope for the lesser performer is not extinguished and drama is enhanced. If the better team always won why would we play?
**Officiating errors.** Umpiring or refereeing errors complicate the interpretation of testing scores. These errors are most often out of the control of the testers. The gamewrights and participants often accept the reality of human error. Baseball has long held that umpiring errors are part of the game. In fact, baseball has been reluctant to use replay or other technologies that could result in correction of errors based on this longstanding tradition. Outcomes and records in testing are sometimes impacted or determined by this type of error, and errors of this type can interfere with interpretations of skilled play. Again, this is a contingency calling into question the outcome and statistics derived from the test.

**Human errors.** The first type of umpire error is due to the limitations of human physical and mental processing abilities. Given the size of the area of responsibility and the speed at which games unfold, errors of omission and unintended errors happen. The human senses do not see all and cannot perceive all. The play at first base in baseball is often a so-called “bang-bang play.” The umpire has to watch the first baseman catch the ball and watch for when the runner touches the base. At times this happens near simultaneously and about four feet apart. It is impossible to see the catch, move the eyes, and refocus in the fractions of a second that this happens. Umpires often resort to listening for the catch, the thud of the ball hitting the glove, and watching the runner’s foot hit the bag. Crowd noise, speed and bobbles sometimes lead to an error in the call.

Errant calls can cost a team a World Series, as occurred in the 1985 World Series when the Saint Louis Cardinals had a 3-to-2-game lead and a 1-0 lead in the ninth inning of game six. Don Denkinger, the first base umpire, called Jorge Orta of the Kansas City
Royals safe at first when he was clearly out. This allowed the Royals an extra out and a base runner, subsequently, helping them rally to win that game. The Royals went on to win game seven as well, to take the series over the Cardinals.

More recently, in 2010, Armando Galarraga lost a perfect game and baseball immortality when first base umpire Jim Joyce blew the final out call at first. When crowd noise interferes with the umpire’s ability to hear what needs to be heard, this can create significant errors that sometimes change sport history.

**Unintentional bias errors.** Another type of error is unintended bias. The official holds some form of bias that he does not even realize is there. For example, a father having to umpire one of his son’s baseball games may end up unintentionally with a larger strike zone for the pitcher when his son is batting in order to not give the appearance of favoring his son’s team. The opposite can be true as well. The umpire/referee may give a break to a lesser talented team or player, giving them extra possessions or even allowing them to close the scoring margin.

Unintended bias can be a concern in judged sports too. Judges, at times, find themselves judging performances of athletes who they like or dislike. In gymnastics and ice skating many judges believe specific body types are needed to be successful. They will openly admonish those athletes who do not fit the physically aesthetic mold the judge expects. This bias most certainly is reflected in lower scores for the athlete. Top athletes who are known and expected to win are scored more liberally than newcomers making it more difficult for unknowns to break into the top ranks.
**Intentional bias errors.** Intentional bias can be classified as a form of human error. During the Cold War it was common for judges from Eastern Bloc countries to downgrade U.S. athletes in judged performances while ignoring errors when scoring athletes from the Eastern Bloc. Likewise, judges from Western countries did the same for their brethren. Recently, in the Winter Olympic ice dancing competition, three of the six judges conspired together to ensure that their countrymen would win gold in specific competitions of the three judged events. They guaranteed that each country would win a gold in one of the events. In all of these cases grave concerns were raised over the scoring of actual performances. How do we compare when subjective scoring (discussed in more detail below) can have such an impact in the final tally of what we consider successful ~ unsuccessful performances?

**Fixing of matches.** Another possible officiating error we have seen all too much lately is the fixing of matches by officials. This intentional bias often impacts the game play, the testing, and the outcome. In the top division of Italian soccer, officials were paid large sums of money to ensure certain results in specific games. Certain clubs were concerned about being relegated to lower divisions and earning less money, so they tried to control the outcome. A recent concern in the NBA was an official who was calling games in specific ways to control the outcome for gamblers outside of the game, which, in some cases, impacted who won or lost, and in other cases controlled the spread of the outcome making it larger or smaller than it otherwise would have been. These contingencies brought into question the test score actually earned by the participants.
Subjective scoring errors. Another form of officiating errors involves subjective scoring. Testing formats come in several forms and one form requires judged performances. Boxing, gymnastics, dance, and diving are just a few examples of this. In these types of physical performance a third party – a judge – assesses the score based on his or her judgment of the criteria met. The judges interpret rules and performance levels of success and failure.

As is the case with officiating errors, subjective scoring is also prone to error. A judge blinked and missed an error in performance or was unable to discern a specific movement. It is common to have a panel of judges in gymnastics and ice skating, and it is not uncommon for each judge to score the athletic performance slightly different based on how the judge perceived the performance. In boxing there is a three-judge panel that each sit at different locations throughout the ringside. They judge the number of direct contacts each boxer makes with his gloves. It is not uncommon for each judge to have different scores, sometimes wildly different. With a boxer facing away or screening the other boxer it is sometimes difficult to discern direct contact and, therefore, the total points. These sports often use a panel to deal with the slight differences in judging in order to average them out.

Performance capabilities. When an athlete is not performing to his or her best abilities due to an injury, fatigue or illness, to name a few examples, it can impact the test and, therefore, the test results. There are a number of reasons why performance and capabilities do not coincide in testing situations. An athlete may have sustained an injury while playing or fatigue can set in. Another reason an athlete can have a poor
performance is when the athlete has not trained properly or has not had proper nutrition. Stress of competition, stress outside of sport, or an athlete’s lack of focus can also affect a test score. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, human nature prevents us from producing consistently excellent performances at will. Nobody can, even if they are not injured, not stressed, not hampered by anything else. We are fallible, imperfect beings. So a score on day one may not reflect our capabilities, therefore, we play on day two and try and perform better. The test score, we say, is a more valid indication of what I can do. In contests, these test score ambiguities often lead to questions about who is better in contrast to who simply played better.

**Intentional manipulation of testing scores.** Intentional manipulation of testing scores can also complicate the interpretation of results. There is a sportsmanlike tenet that recommends that we not embarrass our opponents. In blowout situations, we normally respect the coach of the stronger team who takes out his starters, slows his offense, and restricts his defense in the name of good sportsmanship. We often admonish coaches, even suspending high school football coaches, who win by extraordinarily large margins. We thereby send a message to all coaches that the blowout is unacceptable. Intentional manipulation of that team’s testing results is not only permissible but morally required.

The manipulation of testing scores also occurs, of course, in less defensible scenarios—for instance, when players take money to control the score and sometimes the outcome. A few years ago, a running back for the Toledo Rockets accepted cash to control the score. He would drop a pass or fumble the ball to keep his team from scoring in order to manipulate the final score in relation to the point spread for gamblers.
Northwestern University basketball also shaved points. This was a terrible team that was paid to lose by more than the spread. Of course, such manipulations cause the team to appear to be worse than it really is. And, conversely, it inflates the test scores for the other team. Neither test score then is an accurate reflection of basketball skill. One score is artificially too low while the other’s is artificially too high.

**Variable records.** Technology in all forms has complicated matters. The issue of variable records further complicates our interpretation of testing scores. As more and more attention is paid to sport’s athletes who are seeking higher levels of performance, a variety of technologies have led to better test scores. From performance enhancing drugs, both the legal and illegal kind in sport, to better nutrition, training, and coaching techniques, all have led to better performances on sporting tests.

The advancement of equipment, smaller venues for sports like baseball that facilitate more home runs, as well as the changing of rules, have impacted how teams/players perform. Playing baseball in the cavernous confines of the Polo Grounds versus the modern day launching pad that is the new Yankee stadium is very different. How is it possible to fairly compare Babe Ruth’s 60 home runs in a season—accomplished when no team in baseball hit 60 that year—to Barry Bonds’ 73 home runs? Bonds’ performance was undoubtedly affected by performance enhancing drugs, small parks, better bats, pitchers who threw harder, and a livelier ball. College baseball, with its use of the aluminum bat, has changed the meaning of test scores related to hitting. How is it possible to compare the performances of hitters from the wooden bat era with
those of present times? All of these changes in sport tests make it difficult to compare performance test results from one year to the next.

These eight test contingencies render any simplistic notion of success vs. failure inadequate. This is particularly true of such dichotomous reports as passing vs. failing. Testing achievement is nuanced, complex, subtly different, and difficult to decipher. On the basis of this complexity, it would seem more accurate to say that virtually every testing result has some mixture of passing and failing in it. If this is the case, more sensitive approaches to the evaluation of these results is needed.

We have also seen that meaning from test scores evolves from impoverished to rich. In some cases, a score means virtually nothing. In others, it is full of denotations and connotations. Repetition, comparisons with others, the stability of testing conditions and other factors all influence what any given score means.

Invariably, test scores need to be interpreted. They need to be understood in context. Because comparability of test scores is difficult, results need to be appreciated for what they are in that place, in that moment, at that time, under those conditions.

We discovered that simple answers to the question “How well did I do?” can be hard to come by. The most honest answer in many circumstances may be, “It is hard to say.” A single testing score tells a complicated story about discrepancies of measurement, closed and open tests, the impact of luck and chance, officiating errors, subjective scoring, performance capabilities, intentional manipulation of the score, and variable records. It is often difficult if not impossible to tease the threads of that story apart since one sporting event can have several of these influences impacting the end result at the same time.
Given these difficulties, our tendency to reduce testing scores to dichotomous passing vs. failing grades seems all the more suspect. While cut points may be established for any variety of pragmatic reasons, there is an element of arbitrariness to any decision to count scores above a certain level as “passing” and those below that mark as “failing.” Considering several cases related to Table 3.2, as seen on the following page, can see this arbitrariness and the harm it can cause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Fail</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>90%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>80%</td>
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<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<td>40%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Pass ~ Fail Level of Tests
In this example, the criterion level for passing is one that we commonly use—namely, 60 percent. Of course, it could be 59 percent, 22 percent, 80 percent or anything else depending on the purposes for which we are using the test, the difficulty of the exam, the conditions under which the test is taken, and so on. Wherever the cut point is set, however, this number takes on extraordinary importance. Everything above it is good, and everything below it is not. It matters little how close one is to the criterion point. It brands the person as one who failed or advances the person as one who passed. In American culture, the dichotomous cut point takes on great importance. The student ultimately wants the answer to one question: “Did I pass?” We might consider the situation of two students, one of them represented by point A, the other by point B. The person at B scored 59 percent and failed. The person at A did better at 61 percent. While common sense would tell us that there is little difference between the testing results of the two individuals, the dichotomous cut point suggests otherwise. One failed and the other passed.

A more accurate description of their relative positions, however, might be something like this. Both individuals showed a robust blend of success and failure. The differences in this blend between persons A and B were very slight. Both of them achieved more than they failed, but both of them also found significant parts of the test to be very difficult. This same example could easily be applied to two athletes: one who scored at the 61 percent level and the other who scored 59 percent level in an athletic test. Contingencies may make it difficult to say anything with confidence about who was the better performer. While person A scored higher than person B, the meaning of these results is open to a variety of interpretations.
In short, it might be better to think of passing and failing as complementary pairs rather than exclusive opposites. Passing does not exclude failing, and vice versa. A test result is a blend, a composite, a mixture -- one that allows for infinite degrees of variation and multiple interpretations. The next two chapters will examine merits of this line of reasoning in more depth.

Before doing so, it is important to briefly examine similar complexities found on the side of the contest. Here, in contrast to the dichotomy of testing results portrayed as passing or failing, we will look at the contesting dichotomy of winning vs. losing.

**The Complexities of Sporting Contests**

Having looked at the testing aspect of passing vs. failing, we now must focus on the contest. In sporting contests we take the test, but we do so with the help of others. When we take the test, others are also taking the same test. But we mutually test ourselves under special conditions. The others intend to out perform us, and we try to out perform them.

In open tests we perform a dual role—that of providing a better test for the other person than they provide for us, and that of taking the test better than the other person or side. In closed tests, we perform only a singular role—that of trying to take the common test better than the other person or side.

**Nature of Sporting Contests**
There are certain criteria that must be present for the contest to exist. First, two or more parties agree to be involved. These parties must be committed to scoring better than the other(s) through mutual testing on a common, valid test. All parties also must have knowledge of the others’ progress. These criteria are at the heart of the sporting contest.

In all cases a valid test must be present. As stated previously, this test must be something that is not too easy or too hard. If one can succeed every time out or fail on every occasion, there is no way to show difference. Everyone scores 100 in the first case or zero in the latter one. The very possibility of showing better and worse testing ability does not emerge.

Also, the quality of the contest suffers. If the test is a foregone conclusion then there is no drama. If a test is impossible, once again there is little chance for drama to emerge. Without movement and change, the story has no chance to evolve. Reversals of fortune are unlikely. Boredom would likely replace challenge, intrigue, and drama. The quality of the contest would be diminished.

Differences in ability are presupposed by contesting. The idea is to show a difference in performance to compare degrees of success ~ failure. Valid tests that are neither too difficult nor too easy are needed in order to reveal differences.

For something to be a contest we need two or more parties taking the same or comparable tests. Each party displays their skills in taking the test in order to compare their score with those of others. If the tests taken by the two or more parities are different, it becomes difficult to compare the achievements of each one in relation to the other. In open games the test is never the same because each side tries to create a more
difficult test than the other side. For example, if you have two bowlers, side-by-side, where one alley is “blocked” for much easier scoring and the other is not, one will find bowling easier. In effect, the two bowlers are taking two different tests. Thus the scores are difficult to compare.

Each contestant agrees to try to win. There is a reciprocal agreement that each makes to try his/her hardest, or at least hard enough to prevail. One can only tell their success ~ failure at the test in relation to how the other is performing. If the other is not trying to win or does not take it seriously then they are not performing as well as they could. This interferes with how one sees their own success ~ failure at the test.

All parties to the contest must participate with the knowledge of how the others are progressing. This is a crucial aspect of contesting. How athletes perform and the strategies they use are often dependent on how they understand and perceive their opponents’ performance. Decision-making is an element that is variable in relationship to one’s opponent. If a person is committed to winning and their opponent has a small, surmountable lead, then they would likely take chances they otherwise might not have taken to try to overcome the deficit. Likewise, with a small lead they may play more conservatively. Their decisions, in short, are based at least in part on their opponent’s play in relation to their own.

These characteristics identify crucial aspects of contests that must be present. In a contest athletes want to discern their performance in contrast to those of their contesting compatriots. The features identified here allow them to do so. The result of contests is the plotting of two or more agents or teams on a relative scale of success. Every higher performance is a victory relative to a lower performance and vice versa. However, even
in terms of this rather simple arrangement, a considerable amount of complexity lies just below the surface. Some of this can be seen by observing what is identified in the next section as seven types of winning ~ losing.

**Seven Types of Winning ~ Losing**

Winning ~ losing results can be stratified into seven categories or archetypes. While this is an arbitrary number and one could choose to use more or fewer variations of winning ~ losing, seven shows the basic types we often see. The types are: 1) blowout win, 2) clear-cut win, 3) close win, 4) the tie (in some sports), 5) blowout loss, 6) clear-cut loss, and, 7) close loss.

**Blowout win.** The first type of winning ~ losing is the blowout win. One side overwhelmingly outperforms their opponents. The outcome was not in jeopardy and one party was clearly the more skilled. One example is the previously mentioned Texas girls’ high school basketball team that defeated an opponent by a final score of 100 to 0. This is clearly an example of the blowout win. Media outlets questioned why this game was played and even described the winning coach as unsportsmanlike. Regardless of the ethics of the case, in their win they showed great superiority and they were never challenged in the game.

**Clear-cut win.** In many other contests, there is also the clear-cut win. This is not a case of a blowout. Rather, the losing team in this case is within striking distance of the eventual winners, but could never rally to reach their opponents’ score. The winners
were able to impose their will on the game and control the tempo of play. While the winners were dominant enough to show they were the better team, they could never quite close the door on their opponent and seal up the contest. We often describe this as a “good game, but the winner was clearly the better team.”

**Close win.** The third possibility is the close win. This is a case where both teams fight to the very end. It may be described as a back and forth tussle with no clear-cut superior team. It is common for outsiders to say when observing such a contest, “It is a shame one team had to lose.” In this game the winners find a way at the end to separate themselves slightly from their opponent, or because the score is so close, chance, an umpiring error, or other inadvertent occurrence could produce the victory. This particular game is often described as a good game, a “cliffhanger,” and one with high drama.

**The tie.** Some sports allow for a tie, an outcome with no winner or loser. Ties have to be acknowledged on the winning ~ losing spectrum as a possibility. In these cases both teams end the contest with the same score. While these may be described as great contests, they may also hide other competitive possibilities. When two teams are similarly skilled and they deny their opponent the ability to separate himself or herself, this is an acceptable outcome. Both teams played equally well or equally poorly. Accordingly, they came out at the end of the game with the same score. The tie is a potentially acceptable result because it can reflect the progression of the skills within the game.
**Blowout loss, clear-cut loss, and close loss.** The three types of losses are mirror reflections of the same win types. A blowout loss shows great disparity in performance capabilities between the contestants. The clear-cut loser may keep the score close but ultimately succumbs to the better performance. Finally, the close loss represents only a small measure of inferiority.

All of these outcomes are products that are impacted by the vagaries of the test. A superior soccer team outshoots its opponent with 30 shots on goal to just three for the opposition, but loses one to zero on a fluke, an error, or by chance. The team dominated the match, but fell short in the contest. While the test results are reliant on various contingencies that impact the meaning, the contest is also affected by these issues.

**Test – Contest Relationships**

In the test – contest relationship we are left with four possible outcome combinations. The possibilities, shown in table 3.3 below, describe how each side performed in relation to taking the test while also performing in the contest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Contest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.3 Test – Contest Outcome Combinations**
The best outcome would be to have performed well in the contest while being successful at the test. This result is described as “good, good” in the boxes. The worst possibility is “bad, bad.” This describes an outcome where the team/individual lost the contest and also failed at the test. Another scenario is “good, bad.” This is where a side performed well in the contest, separating themselves from their opponent, but still failed the test. The opposite scenario is “bad, good.” This is where the side performed worse than their opponent in the contest, but successfully achieved the goals of the test. These combinations allow for ambiguous results.

Table 3.4. Closed Test/Contest
In a closed contest all parties take the test. They take the test and compare scores in the contest. Each can succeed or fail in the test and then their comparative score also allows success or failure in the contest, as shown in graph 3.4 above. In this graph, the 50 percent line where everything above it is a pass and everything below is a fail, was arbitrarily selected. That line of demarcation could have been at 80 percent or anywhere else within the spectrum of possibility. Persons A and B failed the test/contest, however, person B did perform more poorly than person A. Persons C and D passed the test/contest, however, person C performed the best of all the players, including performing better than person D. The bars are separated to denote that the two players are taking the same test or similar tests, but they are not part of their opponent’s test, such as a game of golf or bowling.
Table 3.5. Open Test/Contest

Table 3.5, above, shows that in open contests all parties take the test acting as part of the test for their opponent. There is no space between the bars in this table because the players are part of the test taking and the test making for their opponents, such as a game of basketball. They play an offense or defense as the counterpoint to their opposition. Their success or failure on the test is partially dependent on the success or failure of their opposing contestant. A close battle allows one side to show slight superiority to their opponent. The slight superiority over an opponent is demonstrated with one contestant achieving a test at 51 percent score (at point A) compared to a contestant who achieved a test at a 49 percent score (at point B) on the scale of possible scores. The difference is a mere 2 percent, but by just that 2 percent the first contestant out-scored the second contestant.

The like performances are mirrored by their like numbers. A battle where one side shows greater superiority is shown through points C and D on the scale. One side is clearly better in the contest (point C) and receives a 75 percent while the opponent (point D) falls to the opposite number, 25 percent. This clearly shows the distinction in the two performances on the test/contest spectrum.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined testing and contesting complexities. Tests are often thought to have only two meaningful outcomes—passing and failing. We saw that this is
not the case. The evolution of test meaning, the context in which testing takes place, and a variety of contingencies affect the meanings attributed to testing scores.

Contests too are often reduced to only a pair of important outcomes—namely, winning vs. losing. But these comparisons are also more complex than they seem. Competition results are inherently ambiguous because they embody both testing and contesting scores. Open and closed tests create different kinds of contests, and contesting differences are infinitely variable. This chapter looked at only seven of them. This infinite variation, however, can be seen in the graph 3.6 below. It shows in mathematical terms the zero-sum relationship that exists between opponents, where the relative success of one signals a comparable lack of success for the other, where the degree of one team’s superiority signals the comparable inferiority of the other. In the middle, at the 50-50 mark is the tie.
Graph 3.6. Contest Variations Chart

Trying to extrapolate one’s performance through all of the layers, variations and variable meanings creates difficulty in discerning performance achievement. The variations and contingencies of the test, compounded by the complexities of sporting contests, create a remarkably large array of performance possibilities and associated meanings. In light of this variation and complexity, simplistic dichotomous outcomes seem inadequate. Dichotomous descriptions of achievement, in an important way, do not tell the truth, or at least the whole truth about what was accomplished. Just as importantly, this lack of accuracy can have significant normative consequences, particularly in a culture that undervalues failing and losing.

So, each summer when parents who are unable to attend a child’s baseball game invariably ask their child, “Did you win?” the vast field of possibilities and subtleties embedded in any answer could not be captured by any simplistic response from the child.

The complexities of contests are not done justice when we try to boil the experience down to one simple question: “Did you win?” The idea that any answer could truly describe the myriad of possibilities created on that given day would not do justice to a child’s accomplishments, nor those of his or her teammates and the opposition. Too much happened, too many factors came together to create the outcome of each moment within each play, each inning for the six innings they played that singular hot and windy day.

There are better models to describe what sport is than this. Pass vs. fail, win vs. lose do not come close to capturing the complexities sport contests create. We do not do
sport justice by assuming that these simple categories are singularly important, nor do we
do the experience of playing sport justice by believing dichotomous responses truly
describe the actions created by each side’s performance.

The next chapter will examine Eastern approaches to competitive activity,
specifically those of Zen Buddhism, as well as give a brief history of Buddhism, from its
roots in India to its growth to all corners of the world, and examine Buddhism’s many
schools of thought. Zen philosophical approaches may provide an opportunity to
understand the riches that are imbedded in sport beyond the pass vs. fail and win vs. lose
dichotomies.
Chapter 4

Zen Buddhism and Holism in Sport

Introduction

Given the difficulties of understanding competition through such dichotomous terms as succeeding vs. failing and winning vs. losing, it is easy to see how competitors can be led astray by an excessive focus on the end result. We have seen that end results in tests and contests carry variable meanings that speak to each competitive moment and gradations of achievement. Dichotomous end results fail to tell us much about the nuances of the processes involved in getting there. To put it simply, the problem in understanding competition stems from equating competing well with winning and competing poorly with losing.

This dissertation argues competition is the variable of overcoming testing and contesting obstacles confronted by the athlete. While the idea of winning or losing is present, the focus should be on the moments throughout the contest where the obstacles provided by the game and opponent are encountered. Somehow attention needs to refocus on the act of competing and not simply on the point when competition has ended. We need to appreciate the quality of the skillful comparisons produced in games and not simply on the dichotomous categories into which we slot each completed contest. We need to find a new way of conceptualizing competition that sees it as process–product, not just, or even primarily, as product. We need a way of acknowledging the multiple
meanings and robust experiences associated with winning and losing, not just the condition of having won or having lost. Throughout the entire competition, success ~ failure and winning ~ losing are encountered in various forms. At each moment within the test or contest it is possible that succeeding ~ failing and winning ~ losing are integral aspects of the ongoing activity. When we find one of them, we also find the other in an ever-changing mixture. This reconceptualization acknowledges the nuanced nature of the outcomes and the many processes that go into game results. It is living in the moment, aware of each move as it fits into the progress of the game. This approach does not substitute process for product, but emphasizes the interpenetration of the two, the fact that one cannot be appreciated without the other.

Zen Buddhism provides an opportunity to appreciate process~product interdependence in sport. Zen focuses on the moment-by-moment effort, and little significance is given to any hard and fast distinction between process and product, between achievement and non-achievement, between self and opponent, or any other common dichotomies that populate the sporting world. As we will see, four common dichotomies are experienced in youth baseball. They are self vs. other, self vs. equipment, planning vs. action, and process vs. product. The “other” can be an oncoming ball or an opponent who is difficult to manage. Equipment might be a ball, a glove, a bat, or other implement that does not always function in the manner the athlete wants.

Thinking and planning for beginners often comes first. Then the child, on the basis of those ideas and plans, moves into action. And process, as noted, is often overlooked in the child’s nervousness over producing the right product.
These dichotomies are not only unnecessary, but they also threaten the quality of the child’s experience. Fear and anxiety are often prominent in a world of desires filled with either vs. or dichotomies. Zen Buddhism addresses these kinds of issues head on. It promises to promote a more tranquil and unified version of skilled play.

In particular, there are five themes in Zen Buddhism that could help sport practitioners and athletes to refocus the attention given to common sporting dichotomies. These themes -- mysticism, diversity, high demand, self-transformation, and pragmatism -- may help coaches to refocus the attention from a fixation on product so that the player can experience the game in a new, better way. The four dichotomies of self vs. other, self vs. equipment, planning vs. action, and process vs. product are experienced by all players. How players experience these dichotomies, however, can be affected by good coaching and training. Zen-like experiences can help players transcend these dichotomies and provide them with a deeper experience and appreciation for the game of baseball.

This chapter will focus on how Zen Buddhism can provide a framework that better conceptualizes and values testing and contesting experiences of sport. The chapter will be broken into three parts. In the first part, five tenets of Zen Buddhism will be discussed. This is followed by a historically based defense of these tenets and the ways in which they will be applied (in Chapter 5) to a youth baseball setting. In the third part, the four potentially harmful dualisms that are related to sporting success and failure are identified, as noted above. These dualisms will provide structure for the applications of Zen principles to youth baseball in Chapter 5.
Foundations of Zen Buddhism

Applications of Zen principles and values to youth baseball can be facilitated by identifying certain foundations on which this brand of spirituality stands. Five such foundations are worthy of analysis:

1) Zen Buddhism is part of a much larger tradition of mysticism that transcends Buddhism itself. Quality of experience is a central feature of all mystical traditions, and this will be important as different approaches to youth sport are analyzed.

2) Zen Buddhism is not uniform, and just like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, differences within the tradition can be as important as differences between that tradition and others. Many of the practical approaches recommended later in this chapter and in Chapter 5 come more from one brand of Zen than another.

3) Zen Buddhism is called a high-demand form of spirituality. This has implications for practical applications and the avoidance of various “quick fix” Eastern mechanisms that are found in much of the popular sporting literature. This is important as Zen is historically traced from the East to the West and possibilities are examined for translating Zen principles and practices into useful coaching techniques for Western youth sports, as analyzed in the next chapter.
4) Zen Buddhism transforms the individual. Zen is about seeing the world differently than it is currently experienced. Zen is about experiencing the world without the trappings of ego that interferes with the way athletes see their experience.

5) Zen is, among other things, a thoroughly pragmatic form of spirituality. It is grounded far more on what works than what counts as correct doctrine or orthodoxy. Chapter 5 will discuss how borrowing from these elements of Zen pragmatism can be used in adapting its principles to coaching youth sport.

In short, it will be useful to take a brief journey into mysticism, self-transformation, the diversity of Zen, its high-demand characteristics, and its foundational pragmatism before moving on to sport and problems with winning vs. losing, as well as other sporting dichotomies. The key to mysticism is engaging in extraordinary experience. This is also essential for sport. The richer the experience, the greater the reward is likely to be.

**Roots in mysticism.** While this dissertation focuses on the traditions and practices of Zen Buddhism, it does not suggest that help in reforming typical Western attitudes about competition cannot come from other quarters. Certainly one of those “other quarters” can be found in the broader traditions of mysticism itself. Many world religions, including Christianity, embrace forms of mysticism. Many world religions
place an emphasis on a phenomenon that is central to all mystical traditions—namely, quality of experience. In Paul Mommaers and Jan Van Bragt’s book *Mysticism: Buddhist and Christian*, they discuss the emphasis on experience over theory that comes up “again and again” in the writings of mystics, particularly the emphasis on experience (Mommaers & Van Bragt, 1995, p. 14). For example, Bernard of Clairvaux, “one of the great creative geniuses in Western mysticism,” who wrote the *Song of Songs*, talks of the importance of experience in understanding mysticism:

>Only the touch of the Spirit can inspire a song like this, and only personal experience can unfold its meaning. . . . Let those versed in the mystery revel in it; let all others burn with desire to attain to this experience rather than merely to learn about it. (p. 14)

Evelyn Underhill (1995), in her book *Mysticism, A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, begins her impressive study by discussing the importance of experience, and the necessity of transcending mundane experience in order to find a deeper reality:

>The most highly developed branches of the human family have in common one peculiar characteristic. They tend to produce—sporadically it is true, and often in the teeth of adverse external circumstances—a curious and definite type of personality; a type which refuses to be satisfied with that which other men call experience, and is inclined, in the words of its enemies, to ‘deny the world in order that it may find reality.’ We meet these persons in the east and the west; in the ancient, mediaeval, and modern worlds. Their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest: the finding of a ‘way out’ or a ‘way back’ to some desirable state in which alone they can satisfy their craving for the truth. (p. 3)

To understand the importance of mysticism in Zen Buddhism, in short, one must first understand the emphasis on experience over theory. This emphasis is rooted in the
immediacy of experience over second-hand accounts and the emphasis on some form of ecstatic experience over normal or mundane existence. So, we must first understand this initial level in the history of mankind that grew from ancient mystics and which evolved into a second level of mysticism in Buddhism, as well as the third level, which is Zen, a branch of Buddhism. These second two levels are discussed further in the section below on the history of Zen Buddhism. But let us first give recognition to the first level of this evolution, which is mysticism itself. Underhill explains the relationship of mysticism to reality as follows:

> Of all those forms of life and thought with which humanity has fed its craving for truth, mysticism alone postulates, and in the persons of its great initiates proves, not only the existence of the Absolute, but also this link: this possibility first of knowing, finally of attaining it. It denies that possible knowledge is to be limited (a) to sense impressions, (b) to any process of intellection, (c) to the unfolding of the content of normal consciousness. Such diagrams of experience, it says, are hopelessly incomplete. The mystics find the basis of their method not in logic but in life: in the existence of a discoverable ‘real,’ a spark of true being, within the seeking subject, which can, in that ineffable experience which they call the ‘act of union,’ fuse itself with and thus apprehend the reality of the sought Object. (pp. 23-24)

She continues to explain how this relates to Christianity, Judaism and other religions of the world, by stating, “in theological language, their theory of knowledge is that the spirit of man, itself essentially divine, is capable of immediate communion with God, the One Reality” (p. 24). So, we can begin to see that mysticism has a history that transcends and, in some forms, predates that of Zen Buddhism. But mysticism is more than an evolutionary prefix to Buddhism since mysticism influences many forms of spirituality even today.
While Zen practitioners prefer seated meditation as the preferred methodology for promoting mystical experience, the larger mystical tradition includes other disciplines as well, disciplines such as fasting, sleep deprivation, dehydration, drugs, exposure to the elements, extreme physicals exertion, and the use of mantras. No matter what the technique employed, the goal is to affect experience in dramatic and positive ways.

Therefore, while this dissertation focuses on Zen Buddhism, it has its roots in mysticism. This study is interested in affecting the quality of experience of those youngsters who come in contact with Zen-inspired coaching in the context of youth baseball. It is not simply that the goal of the research is for the youth to know at some intellectual level that winning and losing do not matter all that much. The broader goal of this study is for children coached with Zen-inspired techniques to experience the complementary pairs (not dichotomies) of winning ~ losing, self ~ other, self ~ equipment, and planning ~ action in a different way, a better way.

The practice of meditation itself is a mystical experience that takes one from mundane experiences of ignorance and suffering to a higher state of understanding, to a reality beyond that of human suffering. In fact, it is once a person reaches nirvana that he or she truly understands the human experience, and is also freed from the suffering brought on by desire. While this study has no delusions that young baseball players will reach any kind of nirvana, it is realistic to expect a different quality of experience as a result of a different approach to the game, different practice techniques, different teaching cues and so much more. It is mysticism and its emphasis on the quality of experience that points us in the right direction.
Buddhism itself is not uniform. As we begin to look at the history of Zen Buddhism, just like Christianity, we realize that the differences within the tradition can be as important as the differences between that tradition and others. While a belief in Christ is shared by many denominations of Christianity, how each one observes this tenet of faith can be very different. Similar differences, as will be detailed below, can be found in Zen Buddhism.

However, unlike most traditions within Christianity, Buddhism is not an iconoclastic form of spirituality. Buddha is not God, and no single set of scriptures is regarded as authoritative. This helps to explain, in part, why there is a lack of iconoclasm within Buddhism. As explained further in the history section below, there are different schools of Buddhism that grew out of different cultures as mystical practices spread from India to many parts of Asia. When Buddhism was brought to the West, the interpretation of its philosophy (since it is not a religion as many in the West claim it to be) also changed to reflect the ambient culture.

Different forms of Zen were influenced by different factors. Because of this the different sects of Zen rely on different ways to reach nirvana or to follow the path toward enlightenment. Certain methodologies that are prevalent in specific forms of Zen, but may not be found in or heralded by others, will be examined in this chapter.

When Zen is applied to youth baseball, this is done by borrowing from different traditions and relying on some of them more than others. Other scholars and other coaches might prefer different adaptations. But this study will attempt to pick and choose Zen-influenced methods that fit the situation—the uniqueness of baseball, the needs of young children, the American traditions that influence youth approaches to baseball, and
the like. In short, there is no single or preferred adaptation of Zen to baseball, just as there is no single, approved method for Zen disciples to reach satori, or enlightenment.

**Buddhism is a high-demand form of spirituality.** As we will see in the next section, Zen is a form of spirituality that demands not only daily practices of meditation, but also a complete dedication to the philosophies of Buddhism throughout all aspects of one’s life. While this can be said of other great religions, mainstream forms of Christianity, according to some, ask followers to do little more than attend a church service once a week. This could be categorized as a “low-demand” form of spirituality -- very few sacrifices, little need for adherents to risk anything and trust in something greater than themselves, and few requirements for changing comfortable behavior patterns. However, in Western cultures such as Europe and the United States, people who took up the Zen Buddhist way of life had to work against a predominant culture that comfortably saw the practice of religion falling on one day a week, typically Sunday. The “high demand” aspect of Zen is related to arduous training, to a willingness to undergo numerous repetitions, to changing the way one thinks. This typically takes time and work---lots and lots of meditation, eating silently, changing one’s diet, and focusing one’s attention even when carrying out mundane tasks such as weeding a garden.

For any practice of Zen there is a demand that participants use repetition to reach a greater level of understanding. First, there is the overcoming of fear. For instance, Zen uses the guideline of “1,000 falls times 1,000 falls” to help the judo athlete overcome the fear of being thrown. This repetition helps the student understand that being thrown is just part of the process of participation and should not be feared.
This “high demand” aspect of Zen will be applied to the youth baseball experience in the next chapter. Baseball is much like any practice, including judo. It takes ground ball after ground ball to overcome the fear of missing the ball or of being hit by the ball. It takes pitch after pitch after pitch to overcome the fear of the ball, its speed, and the pain it could cause if it struck the batter. In a Western world that features impatience and promotes immediate gratification, this adaptation of a “high-demand” practice methodology will require some creativity. However, Zen approaches to life suggest that there are no shortcuts. Overcoming the dichotomies related to fear -- winning vs. losing, self vs. oncoming object, or self vs. opponent -- will require experiential interventions. It will take hours and hours of practice to appreciate the holistic nature of baseball.

**Zen as a self-transformational philosophy.** Zen aims at self-transformation. The target in Zen practice is always the self. It is about seeing the world differently than it is currently experienced. The Zen approach is to experience the world as it really is, to see the unification of all things. This approach allows us to free our mind of everyday, mundane concerns and to have a richer experience in all that we do.

The four principles of Zen are at the root of this transformation. Following the principles of Zen allows the practitioner to let go of the small things that hold our experiences back. The principles push us to recognize that our own egos often infiltrate our thoughts and hold us back. We interpret, we plan, we try to control matters for our own benefit. This ego-desire is what leads to our suffering. As we desire what we cannot have we become frustrated. This blocks us from attaining what we are capable of.
This desire and the frustrations that go with it hamper our own growth by making life’s road more difficult to traverse.

To combat the ego-desire trap, a person practices meditation to quiet the mind. Once we can control the thoughts that constantly invade our experience, we can, according to Zen practitioners, open ourselves up to the true reality. We begin to transform ourselves and see things for what they truly are, rather than through the lens of our expectations. This opens the door for us to receive much deeper, richer experiences.

This mindfulness is connected to moral action and moral thought, the last two Zen principles. As we begin to see and experience the inner connectedness of all things we have to consider our actions on others. We are transformed not to do good for ourselves, but to do good for all. Through Zen we try to lead an honorable life.

This aspect of self-transformation suggests that youthful athletes will be changing in a more complete way than merely as ballplayers, once under the guidance of a Zen-inspired coaching method. To be sure, they will improve their ability to throw, catch, and hit a baseball. But they will also be aiming at improving themselves by learning to meet the baseball world more intuitively, with greater tranquility, in terms of fewer dichotomies, and with less suffering.

**Zen has its roots in pragmatism.** The pragmatic roots of Zen, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section, grew out of a desire to achieve enlightenment. Zen is not a doctrine that promises salvation, but rather a training method that works more or less effectively. Zen looks for better methods, ones that will promote
spiritual growth more quickly and thoroughly. That is the pragmatic spirit behind the “religion.”

Pragmatically, Zen allows many forms of meditation, which ultimately are ways to reach satori. Even within one of the most common positions used for meditation, which is sitting, Zen allows several different ways for participants to assume this posture. While the lotus position is found in the literature as the preferred position for a person to use, Zen writings also acknowledge that this posture may be a difficult one for all followers to achieve. Therefore, a person may sit in the half lotus position or other positions that may be more comfortable for the participant, especially at the beginning of their training. Zen even allows for individuals to sit in chairs. The idea is to reach a higher level of consciousness; therefore, pragmatically, Zen supports most any method that works.

A brief review of the history of Zen Buddhism will help to clarify these five aspects of this spiritual practice: mysticism, diversity, intensity, transformation, and pragmatism. These themes need to be clarified because they will guide subsequent applications to a youth sporting context.

Historical Roots of the Five Foundations

Applications of any tradition to novel settings can be done well or poorly. Zen Buddhism is no exception. Therefore, this section will show the historical traditions that support the five foundations described above. This history, and related analysis, is designed to demonstrate three things: a) that the interpretations of Zen are accurate; b)
that adaptations for youth baseball are consistent with Zen principles and practices; and, c) that the utility attributed to Zen has precedent in its various traditions.

In order to support these three purposes, interpretations of the historical chronology are offered in appropriate places in order to draw attention to historical facts that support this research’s interpretation of Zen and its intended applications in youth baseball. (These interpretations of the historical chronology are set off with lines of asterisks to provide clarity to the reader.) While there is a degree of arbitrariness to this process, it will attempt to show clear relationships between a specific foundation and the historical record.

**Genesis in India.** Buddhism is considered one of the world’s great religions and is often mentioned along with Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, again even though many scholars argue that Buddhism is a philosophy and not a religion. There are approximately 2.1 billion Christians, 1.5 billion Muslims, 376 million Buddhists, and 14 million followers of Judaism in the world today (“Adherents,” 2012). Zen Buddhism traces its roots to Skyanuni (also known as Siddhartha, Gotama or Gautama), who lived from approximately 560 to 480 B.C. (Dumoulin, 1988, p. 1). Skyanuni (or Shakyamuni) experienced enlightenment, and it is this enlightenment that became the center of Zen Buddhism (p. 5). It is this concrete experience, not doctrine or some arrangement with the Divine that undergirds this form of spirituality. It is fair to say then, that Zen is grounded more in an experience than a person, even though a person was needed to point the way.
It is also important to understand that the Zen version of Buddhism traces its roots to the very beginnings of Buddhism. Since the rise of Western Zen Buddhism in the twentieth century, many scholars make references to Buddhism in contrast to Zen Buddhism. This mistakenly implies that the two can be separated. According to Heinrich Dumoulin (1963), to speak of Buddhism and Zen Buddhism as separate theologies is similar to discussing Protestantism and Catholicism without discussing the common belief in Christ.

The concept of enlightenment is at the core of Buddhism and it is essential to understand that all theology and philosophy related to Zen Buddhism stems from the enlightenment of Skyanuni, who sat under a tree in the lotus yoga position until he experienced enlightenment (p. 6).

According to the Zen Buddhist view, the enlightened vision of the Buddha contains the truths that are decisive for every disciple of Zen. In his preaching, the Buddha presented his enlightenment as the experience of existence itself. The Enlightened One saw things as they really are, that is in their existential reality. Above all, he was moved by suffering (in the broad sense of the term): suffering is rooted in coming to be and passing away, in becoming . . . (p.7)

Zen Buddhism features four so-called truths, and they are centered on the suffering that influenced Skyanuni. Those truths are: 1) all life is suffering, 2) the cause of suffering is ego-desire, 3) to eliminate suffering one must eliminate all desire, and 4) to eliminate ego-desire one must follow the way of the Buddha. This requires commitment to the teachings and practices (such as meditation) of the Buddha.

Enlightenment in Zen Buddhism is the “saving path of liberation” from the natural suffering that is part of living (p. 7). Zen Buddhism insists that desire is the root
of suffering and in order to find enlightenment a person must give up all desire in life. By following the path of Buddha a person can end desire and see the world as it really is rather than as distorted by the lens of their ego.

As mentioned earlier, one common misunderstanding of Buddhism perpetrated by some Western scholars is to interpret Zen as a religion rather than as an all-pervasive way of life (something that historically has no direct analogy in the West). This misinterpretation is also common when attempting to understand the importance of various philosophies in Chinese society, since these were all atheistic philosophies, and not religions, at least not a religion as commonly defined by Western scholars. Buddha is not God, but a model – one who “walked the mystical walk.” He showed the way—that is, the way to mystical experience. It is not Buddha’s doctrine or teachings that distinguished him, but his spiritual achievement. Thus, Buddha is often referred to as the “Enlightened One,” but never as God (p. 5).

Better living for Buddha was not principally a conceptual issue. It was not about getting some formula about life, death, suffering, and salvation right. Consistent with other forms of mysticism, it was about seeing things differently in a natural, intuitive way. It was about training oneself to see better, to see more clearly.

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This principle will be important in the proposed reformations of coaching youth baseball. In the discussions of the dichotomies of winning vs. losing, self vs. other, self vs. equipment, planning vs. action, and process vs. product in sport, the focus will be on experiencing these phenomena differently. As will become clear in the final chapter on applications, Zen-influenced interventions are less cognitive and more experiential, less
related to having the right propositions and more related to embodying appropriate
intuitive insight. The goal will be to establish a right relationship with the baseball world
rather than gaining an understanding about self, world, competition, and other
abstractions.

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This Zen emphasis on meditation and practical know-how is not characteristic of
all mysticism or even all Buddhism. Buddhism began in ancient India, but spread to
the fourth century [A.D.] the [Buddhist] movement had reached a high state of
Buddhism, explained, “the spread of Buddhism from India to China ranks as one of the
major events in the history of religion” (p. 53). Other Asian countries that eventually
embraced Zen Buddhism include Japan, Tibet, Korea, modern day Myanmar, Cambodia,
Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, and Indonesia (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 21). As Zen Buddhism
spread throughout these various cultures three schools of Buddhism evolved:

--Theravada Buddhism
--Mahayana Buddhism
--Vajrayana Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism grew to the south in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand,
Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia. It is considered the most conservative school of
Buddhism and it stresses monastic education and practices (p. 21). Theravada Buddhism
was passed down through one of the earliest written accounts of Buddha’s teachings.
Theravada is a strict version of Zen that prescribes very specific ways to follow the
practice and achieve nirvana.
Mahayana Buddhism spread in the opposite direction, to the north, and became prevalent in China, Japan, Tibet, and Korea. “It is considered a more liberal form of Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhists emphasize intuition and meditation in practice,” and Zen grew out of this form of Buddhism (p. 22). “Mahayanist metaphysics provided the basis for a doctrine of enlightenment, the clarification of which was attempted in heated discussions as to whether enlightenment comes suddenly or gradually” (Dumoulin, 1988, p. 70).

Finally, Vajrayana Buddhism, which is also known as Tantric Buddhism, is centered mainly in Tibet and is the smallest of the schools. Vajrayana Buddhism is more closely related to Taoist philosophy. It tied reason to how one conducted his or her life, and showed how reason brought about a complete understanding of how the “unity of all living beings in the one true nature is grasped, a nature which cannot fully disclose itself because it is hidden by the dust of external things and by confusing ideas” (p. 70). The Vajrayana School encouraged removing oneself from the hustle and bustle of humanity and the external clutter brought on by both the materialism of the time and by the constant clatter of talk. This helps to explain why this school built monasteries high in the Tibetan mountains far away from the populated areas of India and China.

Today, most of Buddhism throughout the world falls into one of these three schools of thought. While Buddhism avoided the intellectualism of Christian philosophy, disagreements developed between the Theravada school (which means “little vehicle”) and the Mahayana (“great vehicle”) school, which was “more elaborately developed (and closer to Christianity, although very little influenced by it)” (Bullock & Stallybrass, 1977, 80).
The difference between these two types of Buddhism [Theravada and Mahayana] can amount, in Western terms, to the difference between agnosticism or pantheism and a theism based on petitionary prayer. But the attractiveness of Buddhism in the 20th century springs from the hope that its methods of meditation may fill the void left both by materialism and by the Churches (p. 80).

As one can see there were disagreements over the methodologies that each found to be important. There were also agreements concerning which strategies worked, more specifically which ones worked best. For the purposes of youth sport, the traditions that will be used are those that emphasize practice over cognition, in-the-world engagement over separation, and repetition and patience over immediate transformations. How and why these particular kinds of interventions are best suited for youths and baseball will be explained. Zen, throughout the years, has seen its share of experimentation and adaptation. What is proposed in the next chapter will do the same. This flexibility has not decreased Zen’s value but rather has shown that Zen practices are easily adaptable to different needs and circumstances.

Genesis in China. Bodhidharma, an Indian monk born around 440 B.C., is credited with bringing Buddhism to China and is considered the first Zen patriarch of China (Sach & Faust, pp. 22-23). It was also in China that Zen Buddhism had its beginnings of institutionalization with the writings of the five chronicles of Zen Buddhism, which were composed over the span of about two hundred and fifty years during the Sung Dynasty, from approximately 1004 to 1279. These represented the first
real compositions of Zen Buddhism and still today account for some of the greatest wealth of the philosophy (Dumoulin, 1988, pp. 7-8). “The students’ zeal and the profound religious understanding of the great masters of the T’ang and Early Sung [dynasties] produced a body of brilliant mondos, ‘questions and answers,’ which cover the entire range of Zen doctrine and experience” (Ross, 1960, p. 21).

The importance of the Chinese interpretation of Zen Buddhism cannot be overstressed. According to Suzuki (1972), the Ch’an movement in China, which was interpreted as Zen, was literally described as a revolution in Buddhism in which “the Chinese mind completely asserted itself, in a sense, in opposition to the Indian mind” (p. 425).

As we look at various evolutions of Zen Buddhism in China we see that there are different interpretations of meditation. One of the key changes that came about from the Chinese influences on Zen had to do with the emphasis on, and interpretation of, meditation. Zen means meditation in Japanese, and meditation is called dhyana in Sanskrit, and ch’an in Chinese. So the Zen school of Buddhism can be translated literally as “meditation Buddhism” (Chan, 1963, p. 425).

When Buddhism first came to China the concept of meditation was interpreted through the lens of Taoism, which focused on “conserving vital energy, breathing, reducing desire, preserving nature,” rather than the Indian interpretation of meditation which focused on “sitting in meditation and concentrating one’s mind to the point of ignoring the external world” (p. 425). The early Buddhist masters in China, including An Shih-kao, Kumarajiva (344-412), Tao-an (312-385), and Hui-yuan (334-416) all stressed meditation that focused on conserving energy (p. 425).
The Indian form of Buddhism involved sitting in meditation and concentrating the mind to the point of mentally leaving the external world. In China, Zen became influenced by the almost cult-like status of the book *Lao Tzu*, which is more commonly known as *Tao-Te Ching*. “In the end, meditation [as interpreted by Chinese Zen Buddhists] meant neither sitting in meditation nor mental concentration, but simply the direct enlightenment of the mind” (p. 425). It was the mind “rather than Ultimate Reality” that became the “central focus of Chinese Zen” (p. 426). Various methods to achieve enlightenment of the mind developed in Chinese Zen Buddhism, including traveling and observing nature, such as the singing of a bird, the blooming of a flower, the movement of a stream, or a drop of rain and other such harmonious interfaces with the world beyond that created by mankind. This is partly the source of inspiration for Chinese art that concentrated on nature.

Other unorthodox techniques of reaching mental enlightenment were also used by the Chinese Zen masters, including shouting and beating oneself so that the student of the master would be shocked out of his “outmoded mental habits and preconceived opinions so that his mind will be pure, clear, and thoroughly awakened” (p. 429). The differences between the Chinese approach to Zen and the Indian approach is summed up as follows:

In short, the whole philosophy of the various methods [of meditation] is to broaden a person’s vision, sharpen his imagination, and sensitize his mind so that he can see and grasp truth instantly any time and anywhere. This type of mental training is utterly Chinese. Nothing like it can be found in the tradition of Indian meditation. In Indian meditation, the mind tries to avoid the external world, ignores outside influence, aims at intellectual understanding, and seeks to unite with the Infinite. Chinese meditation, on the other hand, works with the aid of external influence, operates in this world, emphasizes quick wit and insight, and aims at self-realization. (p. 429)
Prior to the extensive writings of Zen Buddhism during the Sung Dynasty, Zen was passed from person to person in an oral tradition. Bodhidharma transmitted the philosophies of Zen to Hui’ko, who became the second Zen patriarch of China (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 24). Eventually, five different schools of Zen Buddhism were established in China, which were (p. 24):

- The Guiyan School
- The Caodong School
- The Linji School
- The Yunmen School
- The Fayan School

These five schools of Zen Buddhism were based primarily on different teaching methods. Within a period of a little more than a century during the T’ang dynasty, the Zen movement “crystallized” into the “five houses” or schools. Dumoulin (1963) gives one of the best historical explanations for why these schools did not last:

This incipient differentiation is important for the development during the Sung period, which gave to Zen its actual form. The earliest of the “Five Houses,” the Wei-yang [Guiyan] sect, was separated from the latest one, the Fa-yen [Fayan] sect, by approximately a century. Yun-men [Yumen] was one of the strongest personalities of the ‘Zen forest,’ but his House disintegrated rapidly. Only the Ts’ao-tung [Caodong] and the Lin-chi [Linji] sects were perpetuated. In both these Houses the dialectical impulse, which was present in the beginnings of Zen and was cultivated by the early masters of the T’ang period, above all by Shih-t’ou, was developed further. The inclination to theoretical and intellectual activity... was balanced by an emphasis on the instantaneous character of immediate enlightenment, as well as by the concrete, often paradoxical and painfully harsh, guidance of Lin-chi. (p. 122)

As noted by Domoulin, only two schools remain today. The Guiyang School evolved into the Soto School that was carried over to Japan and remains today in that
country. The Linji School evolved into the Rinzai School, whose methods are also practiced throughout Japan (p. 25). While many Chinese Zen Buddhist scholars acknowledge five schools, others divide the growth of Zen in China into seven distinct schools of thought (Chan, 1963, p. 427). The schools that survived did not stress “pure existence only” and offered a mix of theory and practice (p. 427). This combination proved to be important, for Zen was not able to survive in the schools that did not offer a strong mix of theory and practice, “for mysticism, like all other human experience, is dependent on the actual conditions of human life,” explained Dumoulin. (Domoulin, 1963, p. 122).

Clearly, Zen Buddhism not only flourished in China, but it grew into a distinctly different philosophy and approach to life that shows not only the influences of Taoism, but also Confucian doctrine. Certainly Taoism, with its emphasis on attaining knowledge at a higher level, or “knowledge which is not knowledge,” provided a natural spiritual opening that allowed a seamless enjoining with Zen Buddhism (Yu-Lan, 1948, pp. 115-116). Like Zen Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism both talk about having to release oneself from the boundaries of earthly knowledge in order to achieve a higher level of spirituality. The Taoist philosopher Chuang-tze captured this in a story of the sage Yen Hui who was describing to Confucius levels of mysticism in forgetting knowledge:

...Confucius changed countenance and asked: ‘What do you mean by sitting in forgetfulness?’ To which Yen Hui replied: ‘My limbs are nerveless and my intelligence is dimmed. I have abandoned my body and discarded my knowledge. Thus I become one with the Infinite. This is what I mean by sitting in forgetfulness.’ Then Confucius said: ‘If you have become one with the Infinite, you have no personal likes and dislikes. If you have become one with the Great Evolution [of the universe], you are one who merely
follow its changes. If you really have achieved this, I should like to follow your steps’. (p. 116)

Thus, long before Zen Buddhism was brought to China from India, the prevailing philosophies of both Confucianism and Taoism guided much of the social structure and responsibility of daily life in China (Confucianism) and the spirituality beyond the boundaries of society (Taoism). The relationship between Confucianism and Taoism was constantly in flux and changed from century to century. It was in the third historical phase of Taoism (369-286 B.C.) that the “methodology of mysticism” was perfected, and it laid a framework that was closely related to the Zen philosophy of giving up the suffering of worldly desires in order to achieve a higher understanding of the universe (p. 114). In this phase of Taoism, the philosophy stated that “in order to be one with the Great One, the sage has to transcend and forget the distinctions between things” which meant “to discard knowledge” particularly the knowledge of the difference between worldly things in order to attain the ultimate state of “knowledge which is not knowledge” (p. 114). This evolution of the mystical nature of Taoism clearly incorporated the Confucian attention to the necessary social order within society and the need for people to respect and accept one’s place within the physical social order.

Yu-lan theorized that the Taoist religion in China was opposed to what was seen as the religious side of Buddhism but that the philosophy of Taoism found intricate, interwoven natural links with the philosophy of Zen (p. 212). For example:

Taoism, to be sure, is less other-worldly than Buddhism. Nevertheless, some similarity exists between their forms of mysticism. Thus the Tao of the Taoists is described as unnamable, and the ‘real suchness’ or ultimate reality of the Buddhists is also described as something that cannot be spoken of. It is neither one,
nor is it many; it is neither not-one, nor is it not not-many. Such terminology represents what is called in Chinese ‘thinking into the not-not’. (p. 212)

In fact, scholars of Chinese philosophy should be able to see the historical development, and connections, between the ancient philosophy such as I Ching, to the rise of Taoism and Zen, and finally the importance of Confucian philosophy and how it ultimately shaped Zen Buddhism in China. China has the largest population of Zen followers today with 102 million practicing Zen Buddhists, followed by Thailand with 55.4 million, Vietnam with 49.6 million, Myanmar (formerly Burma) with 41.6 million, Sri Lanka with 12.5 million, South Korea with 10.9 million, Taiwan and Cambodia each with 9.1 million, Japan with 8.9 million, and India with 7 million Zen Buddhists (“Buddhist-tourism.com,” 2012).

The adaptations proposed in the next chapter for youth baseball are consistent with the Chinese philosophy that influenced Zen, one that embraced the search for those higher levels of knowledge that are embodied in intuitive insight or immediate experience. This level of knowledge is what we try to attain in our sports. This higher level of knowledge, which we may be attained through repetitious and patient skill development in baseball, allows us to react instead of think. The knowledge, in a sense, becomes part of who we are, not something we have. Furthermore, we have glimpses of no longer trying willfully to achieve something. It just happens. We call such unusual experiences “flow,” “peak experiences,” or some other name that acknowledges their extraordinary nature. The interesting question raised by the various Zen traditions noted
above is why such experiences cannot be the norm rather than the exception. If baseball were presented differently to young athletes, would their chances to experience an unusual harmony between self and other increase?

The Chinese version of Zen was influenced by the goal of ending suffering, a suffering that is caused by worldly desires. Worldly desire in baseball is increased and highlighted by our dichotomous notion of winning vs. losing. We suffer, on this Zen account, because we think we have to win. We suffer because we are too willful, because we try too hard to manipulate equipment, to control the sporting environment, to get a favorable verdict. This idea, or focus, that we must win constitutes our “suffering” in baseball. The fear of losing or failing overrides our sense of being and we cannot focus our mind on the task at hand. The more we worry about the possibility of losing the more difficult it is to attain the higher level of knowledge, and, therefore, the more we encounter suffering. To play baseball without distracting thoughts, and trying to just exist, is the ultimate aim.

As we will see in the next chapter, Zen provides us with a vehicle to eliminate this mental chatter and focus on higher knowledge. It provides an avenue to just play the game, to react and not think. When we put winning vs. losing aside we can end desire and become more whole with the game of baseball and open our self up to a better experience within the game.

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**Genesis in Japan.** Dumoulin explains that “the influx of Buddhism into Japan from the Asiatic mainland begins at the onset of Japanese history” which was around 552
A.D. (Dumoulin, 1963, p. 137). However, it was a “Buddhist renewal” which began at the onset of the Kamakura period (1185-1333) that “gave rise to new schools and, in turn, was carried forward by them” (p. 139). Near the end of the twelfth century, Zen was fully transported to Japan, both in written form and through a number of Zen masters (Yu-lan, 1948, p. 24). Zen was brought to Japan by the four most prominent Chinese Zen masters of the twelfth century – Lan-his Tao-lung, Wu-an P’u-ning, Ta-hsiu Cheng-nein, and Wu-hsueh Tsu-yuan – who traveled to Japan and taught “pure, unadulterated Zen” (Dumoulin, 1988, p. 32).

The person credited most with helping the distinctive Japanese form of Zen Buddhism to evolve is the monk Eisai, who perfected the Rinzai School of Zen (p. 31). Prior to Eisai’s teachings, the Rinzai School was popular in Japan, but it was mixed with other traditional schools of Buddhism, including Tendai and Shingon (p. 31). As Dumoulin points out the Rinzai School, under Eisai, was noted for its simple austerity as well as mystical practices that lead to personal tranquility. This emphasis on austerity, and the mystical experience that leads to personal tranquility, is reflective of the Japanese culture at that time which emphasized simplicity in living, right down to stressing the lack of clutter in the way Japanese furnished their homes. This Zen-inspired approach to sparse home furnishings can still be seen in many Japanese homes today.

Dumoulin goes on to explain that it is important to understand that the warrior class of the samuri had an impact on the development and popularity of Zen Buddhism in Japan. During the Kamakura period, which represented roughly the second period of Zen Buddhism in Japan (1227-1263), the samurai class embraced Zen Buddhism as part of their identity. Dumoulin continues, “according to a popular saying of the time, ‘Tendai is
for the imperial court, Shingon for the nobility, Zen for the warrior [samurai] class, and Pure Land for the masses’ ” (p. 31). There are many reasons why the samurai gravitated to Zen, including its strong ethic of loyalty, courage, and fearlessness. These very values were stressed as being essential to the samurai spirit. The samurai embraced Rinzai Zen practices and were known for practicing sleep deprivation because they believed a lack of sleep opened the mind to further enlightenment (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 26). Rinzai Zen is known for “koans,” which are questions that cannot be answered by a rational mind, while the Soto School of Zen is known for seated meditation.

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Under the Japanese, Zen flourished and influenced all aspects of life. The samurai class and their high-demand training techniques and lifestyles showed how Zen reinforced the warrior ideals that were necessary for survival. Conversely, baseball is not inherently high-demand. Rather, it is the high-demand nature of Zen that influences the techniques that will be applied to coaching youth baseball in the next chapter. To achieve excellence a player spends a great deal of time involved in the activity. The countless hours, days, weeks, months, and years spent honing a player’s skills are Zen-like, but not necessarily high-demand in the way Zen techniques are high-demand.

A Zen-like zone is not stumbled upon, but is achieved through countless moments that are experienced as coming together in that one moment. This is not an easy achievement, or something done quickly in a single season. This is something that is achieved by the years of building knowledge of the skills of the game. In the final chapter the repetitions that help build this bridge to extraordinary experience will be discussed. This high-demand feature of Zen can be applied to how youths are coached in
baseball by adding more repetitions, the pace at which youths are taken to different skill levels, more patience on the part of the coach, and the way the players are taught to seek out the positive elements that come from losing and what can be gained in knowledge from that loss. In other words, losing does not have to be interpreted as total failure when experienced from a Zen perspective.

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It was Eisai’s student, Dogen, who perfected the Soto School of Zen (Dumoulin, 1988, p. 25). Both of these schools of Zen (Rensai and Soto), which flourished in Japan for many centuries and which remain strong today, emphasize meditation similar to the original Indian Zen movement in which the person practicing meditation sits in a lotus position to seek enlightenment. It was this style of meditation that was just one of the differences between the five Chinese schools of Zen. Over the years, the Soto School became much more popular than the Rinzai School and today Soto has more than three times as many followers than the Rinzai School (p. 25). The two schools also differ in how they interpret the experience of enlightenment. Rinzai believers feel enlightenment happens all at once in a great flash similar to the early Buddhist masters in China. This sudden flash of enlightenment was called “satori” (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 25; Dumoulin, 1963, p. 48). Conversely, the Soto followers believed that enlightenment came in small flashes, which they called “kenshos” (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 25). Thus, in the Soto School, enlightenment is progressive.

The Zen scholar Dumoulin devoted an entire book to the unique aspects of Japanese Buddhism. In his discussion of the importance of the Zen master Dogen to the evolution of Zen, he identifies Dogen’s extensive essay entitled Shobogenzo, as a
masterpiece that “is without equal in the whole Zen literature” (Dumoulin, 1990, p. 72). It was in *Shobogenzo* that Dogen explained the way to view all aspects of life as important – including the ordinary and the mundane (p. 72). As we will see later in this chapter, this is one of the keys to understanding how Zen can be applied to sport.

Dogen is also credited with the practice of zazen, which is a form of mediation in the cross-legged sitting position and represented a return to the roots of Indian Buddhism (p. 75). Zazen, which means to sit and meditate, is widely practiced by Zen Buddhists today, even though it is not the only form of mediation. Here is one explanation of the importance of zazen to Zen:

> Zazen is one of the most powerful practices you can undertake in your life. It changes you from the inside out. Zazen can change your perspective – on yourself, on the world, and on your place in the world. By practicing it, you will slowly learn how to cut down the clutter in your head. You will begin to know yourself in a truly intimate way. Likewise, you will begin to more clearly understand the world and the people in it. You will achieve serenity; perhaps for the first time in your life (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 56).

Much has been written on the centrality of zazen to Zen. Suffice it to say that zazen meditation literally transformed Zen Buddhism.

This is one of the places where we see the powerful pragmatic spirit of Zen. Different schools of Buddhism split over practicalities as much or more than over doctrine. Of central importance were the methods that worked best. Zazen proved important, not because it was recommended by Buddha, and not because it was identified as a method in Buddhist scriptures, but because it worked. And, according to those of Dogen’s school, it worked best.
This is the same spirit that will be portrayed in the second half of this chapter and in the chapter to follow. This will be achieved by looking for practices, experiences, ways of focusing attention that help youngsters experience baseball in a different and better way. Much of this will be based on my own experiences of what works and what does not. I am a pragmatist as well, but much of this will also be influenced by the Zen emphases on concentration, repetition, relaxation and loss of fear, finding harmony with the environment, and so on. These emphases will be honored because they work. In short, it will be argued that it is more useful to behave differently toward the baseball world than to think differently about it. No sacred baseball canon is needed.

A brief example will highlight the difference between logic and practice, a focus on orthodoxy and a focus on practicality. Many youth coaches will tell their kids that winning should not matter very much. They may take them out for ice cream – win or lose. But the telling and the compensatory ice cream often do not do the trick. The kids, and their parents, are still focused on that important dichotomy of winning vs. losing, succeeding vs. failing. This form of youth sport orthodoxy does not change how kids live toward baseball.

In the concluding chapter, the analogues of zazen will be examined to seek those more powerful tools that can shape a player’s experience. They will also be evaluated against a single Zen-inspired criterion. How well do they work? How quickly and thoroughly do they help youngsters experience victory and defeat, self and object, self and equipment, and process and product as united, as complementary pairs, in short, as winning ~ losing, success ~ failure, self ~ other, and making ~ being.
Although there were other evolutions of Zen Buddhism in Japan beyond the Soto and Rinzai schools, these remain the largest representatives of Zen in Japan today. The most noteworthy is the Obaku School, which rose during the Tokugawa period of Japanese history (1603-1867) (Dumoulin, 1990, p. 229). The most important monk of the Obaku School was Tetsugen Doko, who lived from 1630 to 1682, and who is best known for printing 6,956 block-printed volumes of all the Buddhist scriptures from all the schools in Japan (p. 305). The Obaku School is known for its “broad worldview of Zen Buddhism” and its ability to “see common threads throughout the numerous schools of Zen thought” (p. 305). Some of the philosophy of Obaku Zen was eventually brought to the West.

**Zen and the West.** Zen Buddhism is practiced throughout the world, including in most Western countries. For the purpose of this study, the importance of Zen Buddhism and how it has grown in popularity in the United States specifically deserves comment since Chapter Five addresses Zen as applied to the American sport of baseball in an American instructional context.

Zen Buddhism first came to the United States in the late nineteenth century, having been brought to the country by immigrants. It was first seen in the enclaves of Asian immigrant communities in America. However, the first time a Zen master is known to have spoken in a Western country was in 1893 when Soen Shaku, “a renowned Rinzai Buddhist master,” spoke at the Parliament of the World’s Religions, which was a gathering of leaders from Eastern and Western religions that was held in Chicago (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 28). Until 1893:
Zen was not commonly known in the United States, and very few people were familiar with most Eastern spiritual practices, except perhaps for academics and scholars. Few books were also available on the subjects. In fact, it wasn’t until after World War II that Zen writers attracted a readership in the West. (p.28)

The first school of Buddhism to be exported to the West was Mahayana, and it came in the form of Zen Buddhism (p. 29). It is likely this form of Buddhism was easy for the people of the mainly Christian United States to understand since Mahayana Zen believes in the notion of salvation. It claims that all people can reach enlightenment (a form of salvation) with the guidance of a Zen teacher. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand the philosophy of Mahayana Zen Buddhism. While sympathetic to the goals of radical transformations of a person’s life, Americans who were accustomed to doctrines, faith commitments, notions of divine intervention, and transcendent salvation, often struggled to grasp Zen Buddhism.

One of the most important pioneers of Zen Buddhism in the United States was Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, whose contributions allowed Westerners a way to more easily comprehend Zen (p. 29). Suzuki was the person who translated Soen Shaku’s speech at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1893. It was Suzuki’s writings that had the brilliant knack of bridging Eastern and Western thought. In other words, he was a master at explaining the philosophy of Zen to Westerners. He married an American and lived in the United States for 12 years, but then he and his wife moved to Paris and then London where he worked as a professor and translator (p. 30-31). In 1921 he began publishing an English-language journal entitled The Eastern Buddhist, which was well received by
Westerners. Suzuki died at the age of 96 and his life’s work represents one of the greatest contributions to Western Zen literature still today.

Shunryu Suzuki was another Japanese Zen scholar who had a great influence on the early growth of Zen Buddhism in the United States. He wrote the book *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind: Informational Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice* in the pre-World War II era of the United States. His other highly influential book was entitled *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki*. S. Suzuki began a small Zen Buddhist congregation in San Francisco in 1959 made up of mostly Japanese-Americans, and by 1962 he founded the San Francisco Zen Center, which is still today one of the largest Zen communities in the United States (p. 33). It is interesting to note that Shunryu Suzuki was from the Soto School of Zen Buddhism, and Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki was from the Renzai School of Zen. Nevertheless, it was Japanese Zen masters who first brought Zen Buddhism to the United States and most Zen practices in the U.S. today have evolved from those two schools of Buddhism.

The post-World War II America was still largely oblivious to Zen until the beat generation of the late 1950s and early 1960s was attracted to its practices. Many of the beat poets practiced Zen, but it was a fairly broad diversion from traditional Zen practices. Beat leaders, including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Phil Whalen, all embraced Zen as a way to enhance their free-spirited approach to life, and they were particularly drawn to the promise of enlightenment. Sach and Faust explained that the concept of enlightenment “was like a drug” to many of the Beat leaders and followers (p. 35). Here is how they explained the unique approach the Beat generation took when interpreting Zen:
Absorbed in the art, literary, poetry, and music scenes, the Beats tainted their practice [of Zen] by binging on alcohol and drugs. Despite this different way of practicing, books, such as *The Dharma Bums*, and poems, such as *How*, reflected the impact of Zen on the authors and left their mark on American literature. The Middle Way was hardly the way chosen by this crowd. However, because of their outspoken nature, their irreverent ways, and their popularity, members of the Beat Generation brought Zen into the consciousness of a wider American audience. (p. 35)

Since that time, Zen Buddhism in its more traditional forms has been studied by scholars and practiced by more and more Americans in the latter part of the 1900s. Today, the growth of practicing Zen Buddhists in the United States continues. Some of the growth came with the influx of Asian immigrants, particularly following the Immigration Act of 1965, and the large-scale immigration from Vietnam following the end of the Vietnam War. Buddhist temples can now be found in nearly every major city and many smaller cities in the United States. Clearly, Zen Buddhism will continue to become part of the fabric of the culture, not only in the United States, but throughout most Western nations.

**Principles of Zen**

Zen requires a person to be actively involved and believe in its system. To do so one follows the four principles of Zen: meditation, mindfulness, moral action, and moral thinking. To reach nirvana individuals must follow these principles in their everyday life.

**Meditation.** Meditation, principally in the form of zazen, is the method, the practice, and the discipline that leads the practitioner towards enlightenment. It is
designed to quiet the mind, improve a person’s ability to focus attention, trust his or her intuitions, push the ego to the background and eventually out of sight. To practice zazen is to get to the very heart of Zen Buddhism. Here is how one text on Zen Buddhism describes the power of zazen:

Zazen is one of the most powerful practices you can undertake in your life. It changes you from the inside out. Zazen can change your perspectives – on yourself, on the world, and on your place in the world. By practicing it, you will slowly learn how to cut down on the clutter in your head. You will begin to know yourself in a truly intimate way. Likewise, you will begin to more clearly understand the world and the people in it. You will achieve serenity, perhaps for the first time in your life. There are endless benefits to sitting zazen. It is a life-changing, powerful force.” (Sach & Faust, 2004, p. 56)

There are other forms of meditation, such as symbolic artwork and creative visualization, the use of physical mandala maps of the spiritual world, and walking meditation. Zen meditation also includes reflection on mantras and koans. In the repetition of mantras and koans a person clears the mind and connects spiritually to reach nirvana. Koans are tools, such as riddles or impenetrable stories, which try to illuminate the true nature of reality. The idea of the koan is to move beyond small thinking, normal thinking and self and move into more unfamiliar thinking and to try to extend thinking beyond one’s common idea of reality. Another meditation technique is just sitting or shikantaza. In shikantaza there is no goal, sitting is a practice in and of itself. We find enlightenment, our Buddha-nature, just by being aware, just by allowing everything to be as one.
To reach enlightenment students study under a roshi or Zen master. They become the guide on a path to find one’s true nature. The roshi is a teacher who leads practice and works as a Zen priest. The teacher has walked the walk and knows the experience of waking up. Their experience helps one find the path to attain nirvana. In all aspects of Zen practice the emphasis is on repetition, patience, and ridding oneself of noisy mind, ego and desire. Through repetition and patience the practitioner embarks on trying to tame the jumping of their mind, to make their ego disappear and end their worldly desires. Only through this is one capable of finding their true nature.

To reach that state of Zen consciousness, a person has to devote hours, days and years to the practice of meditation in the form of zazen or other techniques. As mentioned, there are other forms of meditation, which involve physical movement, such as walking, in order to reach a higher state of consciousness. So, we can see how the practice of Zen can be applied to other physical activities, even sport, to help the athlete live more in the moment and release himself or herself from distracting desires, including the desire to win and, therefore, not lose.

However, movement meditation is usually not the preferred method for spiritual advancement. According to Sach and Faust (2004), “many Zen students report being ‘gripped’ by Zen and are called to the cushion to practice zazen” (p. 58). It is not uncommon for a follower of Zen to try out other forms of meditation and to return to zazen because of this powerful gripping experience. Once again, zazen is preferred for sport and the martial arts, as well as the other forms of meditation noted above.

As mentioned previously, meditation, or zazen, is a practice designed to make the observer aware of the moment, to a life free from the clutter of the mind. Zazen helps
individuals discover how they fit in the world, not how they and the world are separate entities. Zazen promotes the mystical experience of harmony, of bringing self and world together as one. This is the holism of Zen. To understand Zen holism is to see how different elements of nature are interwoven and that all things are connected. It is to realize how thoughts racing through our minds bind us to our material world and keep us from understanding the true nature of our being. Zazen allows us to see things as they really are and not through the filters of our perception, ego, or the limitations imposed by our beliefs and cluttered minds. Here is one way of describing the effect of zazen on normal modes of experience:

> It might seem impossible to actually have an empty mind because thoughts are natural for us, and they will never completely stop. However, we can learn to tame our minds in the way we train our bodies for sports. We can tame the mind not to go running after every single thought it wants to. Most of us can feel victimized by our own crazy heads at one time or another. It does not occur to us that we can stop obsessive, crazy or repetitive thinking. Zazen helps us to control our own minds. (p. 64)

**Zazen techniques.** Zazen, as a practice, is reached through a number of techniques. More common methods of meditation focus on sitting, breathing, and counting. Traditionally the lotus position or other similar sitting positions were used to create a natural, more relaxed and stable meditation position. The sitting posture is important. Since sitting for long periods can be painful and negatively impact the back, the lotus and half lotus positions are recommended. This position best supports the back. The main idea is to keep the spine straight and the top of one’s head pointed towards the ceiling. In these sitting positions one should be relaxed, not tense.
The next step in zazen technique is for the practitioners to be aware of their own breathing. Taking breaths from the individual’s hara, or physical and spiritual center, is essential. Practitioners should be aware of their breaths, but they should not be aware of how they control the mechanics of the breathing process. Next, practitioners should count their breaths. A technique of counting one’s breath is counting “one” for taking the breath in and counting “two” when exhaling. Counting or following your breath over time allows thoughts to glide away, to empty the mind. In Zen practice there are no mistakes; the process is continuous.

After a while, through this process of zazen, the mind begins to wander, to transform, and, thus, to explore. This is natural. The practitioner should simply acknowledge the thought but then return to counting the breaths. This allows the individual to learn to control the persistent leaping from thought to thought that is prevalent in everyday life. This helps to still the mind.

The practitioner is not trying to acknowledge that they are the one that is in charge of this procedure. The individual is not a separate agent who, for example, is doing the breathing. This acknowledgement leads to dichotomous “I am” vs. “I am not” breathing. In zazen a person is searching for the moment where “no one is breathing,” where the practitioner is in a sense “breathed,” and where the mind becomes empty of thought. At that moment this is the realization of reality without filters. On the other hand, once we begin to try to understand it, once we try to figure out why things went so well, we separate ourselves from the moment. This is dualistic thinking that infects our lives and leads to our suffering.
**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is another principle of Zen. Mindfulness is about being aware, being in the moment. At the time of being in the moment the person is aware of everything, is a part of the world around them, not separate from it. Another aspect of mindfulness is ego elimination. To reach nirvana practitioners have to see the moment without the filters of ego, to see reality for what it truly is. Individuals can intuitively recognize what they think or feel but they cannot judge. They can only be aware. To act differently is to lose the moment. Thus, to practice the principle of mindfulness, practitioners must accept a level of mysticism that allows them to experience the moment by removing the clutter of the world around them and removing the clutter of thoughts in their heads. This practice takes on an almost paradoxical nature. They have to try not to try.

**Moral action.** Moral action as a principle of Zen is similar to what we would see in other religions as well. There is the awareness that our actions impact others and that we should do nothing that would bring harm to others. There is an expectation that we live an honorable life and realize that our work should be to help others and not to hinder them. Even the precepts in Buddhism are concerned with doing moral good. Our actions in this world should not destroy or harm life. We should not deceive others or steal. These temptations lead to a path that Zen doctrine warns to avoid. These precepts, like the Ten Commandments in Christianity, are moral edicts that prescribe our actions in good living.
Moral thought. Lastly, we consider the Zen principle of moral thought. It, like mindfulness, is seeing things as they truly are. In contrast to moral actions, it is about our intentions in life and not how to lead our life. The process of moral thought is about being kind, compassionate, and harmless in all endeavors. If these are how we consider the word and our actions then that is how we will act. It is surrounded by the thought of doing the right thing. Zen stresses that if our thoughts are truly moral, then our actions will naturally flow from those thoughts and all our actions will, therefore, also be moral. Zen teaches that the moral action of kindness and caring does not exist in a vacuum but rather is a direct result of moral thoughts. One cannot exist without the other. If a person has moral thoughts, he or she will then have moral actions according to Zen beliefs.

Translating Zen Principles and Practices Into Sport and Movement

As we move toward the sporting context we must apply the principles and practices of Zen to sport and movement domains. All athletes experience common dichotomies in sport, and those will be reviewed in this section. Practices that are designed to show the insufficient aspects of these distinctions will then be examined. Four interwoven kinds of dichotomies will be used to show the inadequacies of our common beliefs about and approaches to sport.

Self vs. other. A basic dichotomy in sport as experienced by the Western mind is self vs. other. The other can be a target (as in archery), an oncoming ball (as in baseball), an opponent who must be manipulated (as in football), and so on. In all cases, the other presents a problem, a threat, and thus serves as a source of tension. The other has to be
managed, controlled, neutralized, struck, or otherwise intercepted skillfully. The other
can be too large or too small, too fast or too slow, too close or too far away.

This self vs. other dichotomy can be seen clearly in sports that have fixed or
moving targets. The target is out there, separate from the self. We see the target as
something that must be hit (like an archery target) or caught (like a baseball). We see the
ball coming towards us and must stop it, catch it, or hit it. Worries emerge. Here I am,
with a heavy, awkward glove on my hand. The target is too far away, too small. The ball
is hurtling towards me and all I have is this small, thin glove. Tension arises over my
ability to interdict the target. My mind creates a distance and formulates the problem of
the target. Dealing with the target becomes too difficult, too problematic. How can I
achieve the goal? We create tension where tension did not exist. We become anxious
about our prospects of hitting the target. Fear overtakes us. Can I do this? Am I up to it?
Will I fail?

This fear of failure, as well as the messages of tension and anxiety, cause athletes
often to tense up when attempting to deal successfully with the target. The more they
“fail” the tenser they become. They try harder only to experience greater tension. Their
minds are cluttered. They begin to ask questions, or have thoughts, such as: “Are my
hands in the right place?” “This hurts!” or “People are watching, and I do not want to
look bad.” The experience moves away from “letting it happen” to “making or forcing it
to happen.”

Zen masters offer solutions to rectify this illusion of having to control the other.
One of the most basic interventions employed throughout Zen involves a refocusing of
attention on breathing. The practitioner focuses on his or her own breathing, taking deep
breaths from the person’s center and slowly letting the breath out. This is part of a process to get the student of Zen to relax. If a person is focused on breathing, then he or she reduces the focus on other stimuli that are creating tension. It is easy to see how this can be applied to sport situations.

Another approach to help with relaxation used by the Zen master is having the student close his or her eyes. In *Golf for Enlightenment*, Deepak Chopra (2003) explains that the Zen teacher creates the ideal Zen playing conditions in golf by having the student putt in the dark. The student first sees the hole at a certain distance from himself. Then the lights are turned off or a blindfold is used to cover the pupil’s eyes. This removes all stimuli of distance, traps and undulations that cloud the mind and refocuses attention on the actual target (pp. 106-113).

Another similar Zen technique for reducing the significance of the other is taking the target away. Eugen Herrigel, in his book *Zen and the Art of Archery* (1989) points out that his Zen master removed the actual archery targets so as to focus the archers’ minds on the act of releasing the bow, and to keep the mind from over focusing on trying to hit the target. If the archer produces the “proper shot,” which is the intention, then hitting the target will take care of itself. The process was to create a state where good shots could happen. Therefore, this technique removed the archers’ dichotomous thoughts of self vs. other, and got the archers to see that these are actually a complementary pair of self (shooting the arrow) ~ other (hitting the target).

Another tool of the Zen master involves the clever use of verbal cues. Herrigel’s Zen master instructed him to “stop thinking about the shot . . . that way it is bound to fail” (Herrigel, 1989, p. 71). The master was pointing out that Herrigel’s mind was allowing
his ego to get in the way of the archery shot. As he thought about taking the shot he created thoughts and judgments that impacted his perceptions and, therefore, interfered with the shot.

Also, the Zen master uses repetition to familiarize the beginner with his or her task. After thousands of repetitions the mind releases tension caused by fear of failure and ego of success. After falling a thousand times we no longer fear the unknown of falling. After that, we can accept the outcome and flow with the movement.

These are all tools the Zen master uses to break down the self vs. other dichotomy. The target (other) is not out there somewhere; the target is here within us (self). Once we understand that we are the target (other), then we can release the fear and anxiety built up about that “other” thing and begin to see a continuity between self~other.

**Self vs. equipment.** Another basic sporting dichotomy is the one that exists between self vs. equipment. Equipment is something used to strike a shot, catch a ball, or improve effectiveness at running, to name a few examples. Equipment becomes something we manipulate; it is something we carry with us to our practices and games. Equipment is not seen as part of us, our body, our flesh, but rather as an external aid, a piece of wood or metal, for example, that we grab hold of and use.

Much like the self vs. other dichotomy, athletes’ equipment is something to be controlled, manipulated, or otherwise skillfully managed by the self. Equipment, like the other, can frustrate the athlete. The equipment is experienced as too heavy, too big, too unwieldy, and sometimes too light, or having too small of a grip, to name but a few scenarios.
Zen suggests that this dichotomy of self as separate from equipment is an illusion. Athletes, in fact, can have unifying experiences with their equipment. The actual way athletes experience their equipment is much more profound. All athletes develop a relationship with equipment. The equipment becomes an extension of the athletes in their sport. We unite with our equipment. When we swing a racket we get a feel for the extension of our reach it provides us. We notice the weight the racket adds to our movements. Too heavy or too light and the racket does not feel right. We practice so that we no longer think about the equipment in its use. The racket or paddle becomes an extension to our body that provides added reach to the ball. We no longer think to strike the ball in the center of the racket, but we just strike the ball.

The Zen master’s primary tool in helping the athlete move beyond the dichotomy of self vs. equipment is repetition. For Herrigel, the bow and arrow became extensions of his hands, and thus, part of him. He did not manipulate the bow to shoot the arrow, but the arrow shot itself. The repetition allowed his mind the freedom to not have to focus on the task of shooting, but rather to just allow it to happen.

**Planning vs. action.** Another illusion that exists is the dichotomy of self-will and the subsequent behavior of planning vs. action. This dichotomy can also be expressed as thinking vs. doing, or planning vs. subsequently acting. This is about believing that we as the athlete have control over our reactions. We are the ones who “will” some outcome or play to happen. Nothing happens in sport unless we will it. In these cases our ego is in charge and we take responsibility for the actions in the contest. This control is the
illusion. The sequence of planning and then acting is also an illusion. When “it happens,” there is no separation between thinking and doing.

Our ego constantly gets in our way. We worry about our own agenda, where we think we ought to hit or play. We develop scripts for our actions, for our success. We create scenarios in our minds of how the contest should go and then become frustrated when the outcome is different. We force this will onto an environment that is not always accepting. The batted ball hits a base or takes a funny bounce, and we are again faced with the idea that we are not in control and never were. We must react intuitively, appropriately, peacefully.

We try to rely on our thought processes rather than our reactions. As we bat in baseball, we expect the pitcher to throw our pitch, the one we want. We try to out think the pitcher on what pitch we expect him or her to throw. We rely on our expectations given the situation rather than letting go of control and allowing our reactions to take over. At times we lack trust in our skills and rely on trying to out think or out guess the opponent. We do not trust our bodies to perform appropriately. Our success or failure at certain actions creates thought processes that begin to impede our progression in the sport.

However, our experiences over time provide us with a certain ease of play. We begin to intuit play and action. Once our fears are quieted we move toward spontaneity in our actions and we begin to better understand flow and the Western idea of “being in the zone.” This experience is “allowing it to happen.” We do not control the game, but the game happens.
The Zen master’s work of breaking down this dichotomy of planning vs. acting is accomplished through patience and practice. Through the repetitions, the breathing exercises and other techniques, the master shows the way of quieting the mind and to quieting the ego. If the student is patient, the solution to the sporting task eventually comes to him or her. Through practice the student is able to quiet the mind and empty the mind of clutter, such as worry over control and outcomes. Eventually the student understands why Zen masters talk about the hara, which, as mentioned earlier, is the physical and spiritual center. The seat of the behavior is in the belly and spine, not the head. Thus, the Zen master would instruct an athlete to “act from your hara” not your head. The center of action is not your will, but your physical (belly/spine) and spiritual center.

Often our ego leads us to aim at the big play -- the home run, the big pitch, or the spectacular spike in volleyball. Rather than yielding to the environment we try to control it, to force it to bend our way. We tend to project our wants and needs instead of seeing the reality for what it is. Zen experience has more to do with yielding than with forcing, with seeing rather than projecting, with relaxing more than planning to excess. When we try to control the game we plan too much and relax too little. It is through relaxation and having an open mind that we allow the game to happen. We create an atmosphere where the action happens without the interference that holds us back.

**Process vs. product.** Two types of dichotomies exist in this category. The first is testing process vs. product, and the second is contesting process vs. product. Commonly we emphasize product over process. It is the fact of having passed the test
that matters, not the process of succeeding along the way. It is the fact of having a victory in hand that matters, not the process of aiming at a victory. Success is sinking a shot, hitting a ball or winning the contest and it becomes more important than the process of how those outcomes came about. These emphases on end states help to exaggerate zero-sum thinking in sport where one side’s success spells the other side’s failure, as we saw in Chapter 3. These emphases on reified end states provide only rough approximations of what really happened, again as was argued in Chapter 3. Zen, in fact, is not impressed with artificial ends. As a project is finished, we move on -- like a flowing river.

If the target in sport is us, we are never finished. We move on. Thus, some of the questions Zen masters have for their pupils are “Who created ‘it’?,” or “Who created the end”? As the master pointed out to Herrigel, after he celebrated over a good shot, “What I have said was not praise, only a statement that ought not to touch you. . . . You are entirely innocent of this shot” (Herrigel, 1989, p. 77).

Zen focuses on the practice, the progression. Sorrow is not to be expressed with bad shots or athletic attempts, nor should good shots or athletic feats be celebrated. As Herrigel’s Zen master continued, “You know already that you should not grieve over bad shots; learn now not to rejoice over the good ones. You must free yourself from the buffetings of pleasure and pain, and learn to rise above them in easy equanimity” (p. 87).

The practice of Zen to free oneself of all desires, since they are the root of suffering, is an acknowledgement of the fact that desire in sport separates the athlete from the true experience of the moment. Athletes should not consider the dichotomous concept of process vs. product, of trying to win vs. then winning. It is all one. Worries
over process vs. product produce clutter in the athlete’s mind. Athletes who overcome this distinction seek emptiness and ultimately enlightenment in the “knowledge of no knowledge.”

These are just four among many of the dichotomies that we experience in sport. These four were chosen to give brief examples of how we experience sport. Any number of examples could be chosen, but these should be sufficient for showing differences between Zen and Western ways of experiencing sport.

Conclusion

Zen Buddhism provides us with avenues for breaking down one way of seeing the sporting world and offering another path. We know that all athletes experience common dichotomies in sport, and that there are practices that demonstrate the insufficient aspects of these distinctions. Interwoven occurrences of dichotomies were specifically addressed in this chapter to show the fallacy of our beliefs about sport.

Zen provides us ways to rethink our Western sporting practices and our over emphasis on winning vs. losing and passing vs. failing. Zen Buddhism also provides a potentially superior pedagogical experience for young athletes. Zen is an approach that carries less anxiety, less tension, and less fear. While it does not dismiss the issues of winning vs. losing altogether, it frames them quite differently.

Zen is being in the moment, the focus on the end result of winning vs. losing is not. Zen is the moment-to-moment realization of what transpires in our sport. Winning vs. losing is after-the-fact comparison of scores. The moment has passed. Every moment, every play, every inning of every game is the continuum of winning ~ losing,
passing ~ failing. Every moment has each within it. To stop to assess success vs. failure is to no longer be in the moment and no longer just playing the sport.

Winning vs. losing, passing vs. failing is ego. Desire to win/pass leads to suffering. When we desire those outcomes it creates fear of losing, which can impact performance (and creates suffering). The desire to win can lead us astray; we do things to control the outcome. It is no longer about our play, but how to create a positive outcome.

For Zen, Western ideas of passing vs. failing in sporting tests become difficult to comprehend. Zen would ask: What is passing?, Why 60 or 70 percent?, Why is 60 percent good, but 59 percent – seemingly the same – so different? Both appear to be performances with some level of acceptance, but are they worthy performances? The focus for Zen is to strive to improve. The cut point is neither good nor bad, it is just a point according to Zen tenets. On any given scale of achievement there are many points that can be attained in the journey we have taken.

In Western thought we try to categorize the end result. We emphasize the end result -- the product -- to describe the action. “It was closer than the final score” or “it wasn’t as close as the final score” is how games are sometimes described. All focus is on the end result and even the process is put in relation to the product.

Conversely, according to Zen, the process is where the knowledge exists. The process is the quest, a Zen master would say. The sport exists in the process and our skills are attained and assessed as part of that process according to Zen philosophy. Zen would not necessarily conclude a person is a good player because his or her team wins. We look at the athletes’ skills, regardless of outcomes, to determine their levels of ability.
We, as the players, are constantly trying to better ourselves. That is not necessarily a linear process and Zen philosophy would argue that since it does not have end points it could be seen more as a circular existence in an athlete.

When we look at what a “successful” contest is through a Zen lens we do not determine it by the dichotomy of winning vs. losing. Instead, sport tests and competitions viewed through a Zen lens see that a good contest is often close and it has tension and that the tension creates interest in the play and the expansion of the players’ skills. The closer the game the more tension there is. The more tension in a game the more interesting it becomes.

Winning 100 to 0 has no tension and it does not matter. In fact, did a contest even take place when there is such a lop-sided score? Zen Buddhism tells us that none of this matters, and furthermore, all this emphasis on winning vs. losing is pulling us away from a path that leads to a more enlightened state for the athlete, and ultimately, to a state of consciousness that transcends the physical experience to carry the athlete into an almost different state of understanding the sport moment.

The next chapter will revisit the four issues outlined above and flesh out their implications for practice in a youth baseball setting.
Chapter 5

Applying Zen Philosophy to Coaching Youth Baseball

Introduction

Seven-year-old Johnny arrives for his first baseball game. Dad signed him up to play, and Johnny is not yet sure that he wants to be on the team. He and his dad have watched a few baseball games together on television. But this is the first time that Johnny has been called upon to play.

Johnny’s team has had a few practices where the coach tried to teach them how to field ground balls. There was a lot of talking, and eventually the coach hit a few balls at them. Even Dad played catch with Johnny in the back yard and threw him a couple of grounders . . . once again with a lot of verbal instruction about what to do and what not to do.

Most of the time Johnny stuck his glove out and the ball went this way or that, never quite falling into the pocket. A few times it hit the glove only to bounce out. These were light hits and soft throws, but all Johnny could think about was not getting hit by the ball coming all too quickly at him. Once in a while at practice he would hear the coach yell, “bend your knees” or “reach out and grab it!” What did that mean, Johnny would ask himself? What does the coach mean, reach out and grab the ball? It would be easier to pick it up after it had stopped rolling, Johnny thought.
It was the day of their first game and Johnny’s team warmed up by playing catch. The coach hit a few grounders to each of the boys in the infield. He told them to block the ball, pick it up and throw it to first. He kept yelling different instructions; all the while the kids were running around trying to follow the few tips they could understand, but mostly trying not to get hurt.

The game was starting and Johnny’s team was in the field first. He was supposed to play third base. Johnny was not really sure where third was or, after he found it, where he was supposed to stand. “Should I be on the bag?” he asked himself. Once the parents had situated all the players on the field, one of the other team’s coaches began to toss the ball to a hitter. Johnny’s coach was yelling at the fielders to get on their toes. “That seems an odd way to play,” Johnny thought to himself. The coach yelled, “If the ball is hit to you, catch it and throw to first.” Johnny immediately thinks to himself, “I hope it isn’t hit to me.”

The first inning goes by and no ground balls come Johnny’s way. Relieved, he trots over to the bench. The coach is now yelling instructions about hitting and running to first. The boys are all excited and hope to get a chance to hit. The coach pitches to them, but most miss the ball. The coach keeps yelling, “bend your knees, elbow back, level swing, eye on ball,” and other such instructions. None of it really makes sense to Johnny, plus it was hard to remember everything because the coach was talking so fast. “How can I hit the ball standing like that?” he thinks to himself. “I just hope I don’t get hit by the pitch,” is a constant thought running through the young boy’s unsettled mind.

Most of the words from the coach are a jumbled mess in the heads of the young players. They are unsure of their meanings or what the coaches are talking about. They
ignore most of it and just hope they do not strike out, disappoint their parents, or get laughed at for doing something wrong. Johnny remembers his Dad yelling at the television when one of the professional players missed a play. He hoped his Dad would not yell at him if he made a similar mistake.

The team was now done hitting and the coach sends them back onto the field. Johnny grabs his glove and the coach tells him to head to shortstop. “Coach, where is shortstop again?” he asked. “Halfway between second and third,” the coach tells him. Johnny nervously goes out there, hoping for an uneventful repetition of the last inning.

The first batter hits the ball slowly towards short. Johnny thinks “oh no, what do I do?” He waits as the ball inches towards him. The coach is yelling, “charge it!” In Johnny’s mind everything is happening too fast. “How do I catch it?” he thinks. He waits and waits. Finally, the ball arrives and Johnny sticks out his glove stiffly. The ball collides with the unwieldy leather mitt. There is no “give,” and the ball bounces back out of the glove. Everyone is screaming, and people are running. Someone is shouting to throw it to first. Johnny becomes flustered and throws the ball about 10 feet and in the general direction of first base. Everyone cheers. “But who are they cheering for?” Johnny thinks to himself.

And so it goes across ball fields all over the United States every May through August. Kids are terrorized and enchanted by this game we call baseball. Most of the young children suffer, at least in a Zen sense of that term. They want, need, hope, strive, plan for, and worry. Some even end up crying, not really understanding why they are brought to tears over something their parents promised would be so much fun. Their minds are often cluttered with a lot of useless chatter – usually encouragement and
guidance yelled swiftly at them by well-meaning adults. Their own fears of failing, faltering, and not performing better than the other kids paralyze them, often to the point of inaction.

This study suggests that coaches and parents should be able to negotiate this introduction to baseball better—specifically, to find a way to quiet the mind . . . both their own and those of their children. They should be able to restore the fun, and reduce the stresses related to succeeding and failing, winning or losing. If the young baseball player’s mind is full of worry and fear of failure then their consciousness, on Zen Buddhist grounds, is full of suffering.

Can coaches offer a path that leads these young players on a journey that has less chatter, less fear, and, ultimately, less suffering? Can coaches help young athletes overcome the worrisome dichotomies that seem to be part and parcel of baseball? Can coaches actually coach toward a kind of Zen tranquility that better opens children to the wonders available in baseball?

**Youth Baseball and Zen’s Philosophy on Suffering**

Youth baseball seems to be a venue that empirically verifies the first of the four noble truths in Zen Buddhism—namely, that all life is suffering. Baseball, after all, is a game of failure in many respects. The best hitters, those who are enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame, for example, succeeded only about 30 percent of the time.

As explained in Chapter 2, no matter how well people play, and no matter how close a score might be, everything boils down to two exclusionary outcomes. This is the either vs. or thinking of dichotomies. If a youth’s team is on the losing side of the
winning vs. losing dichotomy, there is little left that would redeem or justify the experience. They simply have to play again and hope for a better outcome the next time.

It is not that parents and coaches fail to downplay the importance of winning. They do, or at least they try to do so. By patting kids on the back after a close loss, by taking everyone out for ice cream regardless of the outcome, and by telling them that losing really does not matter all that much, they try to put the winning vs. losing alternatives into a healthy perspective.

This usually does not work. Particularly in the United States, children are never fully convinced that losing is acceptable. This is understandable. How could they be convinced when they see their parents screaming encouragement, shouting at the umpire, chastising the coach, and groaning when someone makes an error, and, conversely, when they see them screeching for joy, jumping up and down, and clapping enthusiastically when someone gets a good hit. The very loud messages in American culture about the importance of winning drown out those that would present a more balanced approach to the game. In the end, it is all about the winning . . . and the kids know it.

If we can free the players from current attitudes toward the values of competition, we can help them attain a deeper appreciation for the game itself. Children in all sports could benefit from this reformation, but nowhere is this more important than in youth baseball. Often, we are dealing with young, tender minds who are playing the game in a formal setting for the first time or within the first few years of their initial experience. Hopefully these experiences are positive and lead to a lifetime of playing or enjoying the sport. Many of these children could play the game through high school, and some could eventually become youth baseball coaches themselves. Their early impressions of this
game are immensely important, and, like all early childhood development, these experiences will impact them throughout their formative years of growth and development. The overall goal in this transformation of youth baseball and its attendant suffering is to allow young baseball players to experience a wholeness that overcomes the dichotomies of our worldly mind. We need to find a new way – a better way – to introduce children to, and allow them to experience, this wonderful game.

**General Practices and Principles Inspired by Zen Buddhism**

In the last chapter it was explained that Zen is a form of mysticism, a school of thought that includes considerable diversity, is a high-demand spiritual practice, a self-transformational force, and a pragmatically grounded type of spirituality. In baseball, especially youth baseball, all of these factors should give us clues about better ways to teach the game. When baseball is coached, these ideas should be at the forefront of the way the game is approached.

**Practice and Participation Guidelines Related to Mysticism**

**Emphasize experience, not ideas and propositions.** This means, among other things, that there needs to be less talk and more action, less presentation of tips and propositions and more concrete interaction between the player and the baseball world. One of the classic mistakes made by coaches in the West is to talk too much and analyze skills in terms of the right way vs. the wrong way to play. Mysticism suggests that special experience emerges from commitment, and focus of attention, practice, and more practice. Mysticism suggests that children should be growing towards a closer
relationship with the game not developing a better conceptual understanding of it. Zen-inspired baseball is intimate and personal, not abstract. It features high-contact learning, not occasional-contact education. It offers a new way for the kids to experience baseball. It offers a qualitatively different way for children to connect to the different aspects of baseball—the fielding, throwing and hitting.

**Emphasize growth and evolution, not judgment.** Realistically, success ~ failure as a complementary pair and not a dichotomy is a constant companion in the Zen learning process, but little is made of anything at one extreme or the other. Every act, every move, every attempt of a child to get it right is one moment within the continuum of success ~ failure. After any one of these practice events, the question is not one of congratulations or blame. It is one of how to move on, of what is appropriate now, of what comes next. The answer to these questions is more experience, more practice, and eventually a better quality of relationship with the world of baseball.

**Emphasize focus of attention.** First, in emphasizing focus of attention the coach should start with focused playing, not accumulation of information. As noted, too often in youth sports coaches spend a great deal of practice time giving instructions, even though children’s minds are wandering. Coaches believe that detailed explanations stand as precursors to successful play. Zen practitioners believe this is wrong. Doing, they think, is intimately related to theory. In this variable mixture, doing often takes the more prominent role, particularly with younger children. Moreover, theory is often
inadequate when trying to account for the magic of the doing. It almost always falls short.

But coaches insist otherwise, and this is another one of their classic mistakes. If the kids are not being told what to do, coaches think, the children will not do it right. When errors occur, coaches believe they need to stop play and re-instruct the kids. There are rules to go over, instruction on skills to cover, various tips on play, theories on strategy, and so on. While some of this is not entirely useless, it is still overkill. Very few of these explanations will be retained by the children anyway. Something that would be far more useful is to allow the children to learn concentration through the experience of playing.

Children in particular have short attention spans. While the coach spends all this time instructing the children, after a few moments, the children begin to zone out on the coach. Children get distracted, children get squirmy and need to move, and children do not have the attention spans to sit still and listen as someone drones on with detailed instructions about anything and everything baseball. In fact, this confuses them since they think they were signed up to play a sport and not sit for long periods and listen to a coach hammer out instructions.

Many of the words used by the coach are often learned by the coach through a higher level of intellectual maturity via high level experience, a coaches’ meeting, watching the game on television, or an instruction manual. Often these words and concepts are too complex for children to understand. Remember that most coaches of youth baseball are parent volunteers who are not trained in childhood education, so they are not well versed in what level of understanding the children they are attempting to
coach have. Nor do they understand the large variations of maturity — including disabilities such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) or slow gross motor development — that exist within any given age group of children.

To escape this trap the coach needs to capture the children’s attention with quick, simple verbal instructions and a physical example of what is being taught. Then the children should begin focused practice drills with one coach working with three to four players at different stations working on. These stations, for example, should include such drills as hitting off tees, running the bases and learning to touch the bases (for the very young), and for all youth players fielding grounders, catching pop flies, pitching and catching, and working on flip drills. During these drills the coaches are not overly communicating verbally, but just letting the kids do the drill, do the drill, do the drill.

**Emphasize the quality of experience, meaning, and depth over breadth.** Zen aims not merely for more learning through physically experiencing the baseball games and practices, but also for a higher quality of that experience. Depth is more important than breadth; a closer relationship with the game is more important than a mere introduction to this activity. One of the classic mistakes made by youth coaches is to merely introduce players to the game rather than provide an immersion experience. It is hard to fall in love with something that the players do not know very well. And to make matters worse, this introduction, as noted, is often provided more verbally than experientially.

A coach influenced by Zen thinking would identify a small group of basic skills, skills that are central to the game, and have the kids work on those in a fun, relaxed
manner. For instance, three such domains might be those of hitting, throwing, and catching. Repetitions would be focused. There are specific throwing drills that the kids could work on that create small, fun competitions out of trying to direct the ball to specific points. Another fun drill in hitting is when the coach gives each player points for hitting the ball, and higher points for hitting ground balls. Also, the kids can “play” a game of seeing the number of times they can catch it in a row, including a variation where each time the players catch the ball the coach has them get a little further apart. All these drills would emphasize repetition, repetition, repetition and would make learning these skills fun for the children by turning it into a more relaxing, Zen-like “play” environment that is child-centered.

It should be noted here that one of classic mistakes of coaching youth baseball is to have too many players watching while only one or two are doing, experiencing. This guarantees a lack of repetition. That is why it is always important to break these types of practices down by skill level and ability and to have smaller groups of players working off of each other’s skills through the types of drills mentioned above in order to improve their own skills and, more importantly, to continually enhance their love for the game.

It is better as a coach to let the children explore the game of baseball in a childlike manner that focuses on having fun. This will allow the kids’ minds to be focused on the task at hand, such as stopping the ball, without realizing they are “working” on developing their skills. It also allows their mind to come to terms with their particular skill, such as the skill of fielding. They experience less fear and less mental clutter, and much more fun.
Emphasize the paradox within the game, not the obvious meanings. One obvious meaning in baseball is related to danger. A person can be hit by a pitch and it can hurt! When fielding a player can take a bad hop in the face, and that can hurt too. A ball can cause the hand to sting when it hits the glove. One of the classic mistakes made by many coaches is to avoid the fearful and, consequently, to fail to eliminate the natural fear that young players have of being hit by a ball. Instead, coaches should have the players, when batting, go through the process of first getting used to having balls thrown at them near their body as they stand with a bat. Soft safety balls can be used and this would allow the kids to get used to balls coming at them, even hitting them, and to help the players lose this fear of being hit.

The youth coach must be cognizant of fear zones. The coach must identify the fear zones that the players face and how to overcome them. Each player comes to the game, especially at the younger levels, with incredibly different playing ability. Because of this the coach may have to separate the team by like skill to work on the different fear zones that arise.

Obviously, the basic Zen approach to breaking down fear zones is the high-demand format of repetition. Repetitions allow the coach to see how the players live their fears and to find ways to combat them. Repetitions, as discussed in more detail below, also help break the fear zones down by making the players more comfortable with their abilities.

One of the ways that coaches can help their players overcome their fears, as mentioned above, is by using softer balls. When fielding, hitting, or catching with a hardball the players – unsure of their own skills – will often pull their head away from the
action. The young player is afraid of being hit and will try to remove one of the player’s most vital parts – the head – from the action. When the head gets pulled away from the action, so do the eyes of the player. This compounds the young athlete’s difficulty in trying to accomplish the task.

By using softer balls, such as tennis balls, the coach can limit this fear in players. Getting hit by the softer ball is not as painful as with a regular baseball, so players can more confidently stand their ground. Youthful players can then experience the ball hitting the target -- the glove -- and begin to experience the game at a new, higher level than before.

As the players become more comfortable with their abilities to stop or hit the ball, then the coach can begin the progression towards the use of harder balls. At each stage the players receive information about their abilities and the pain that will be caused by the ball. The players get used to fielding or hitting with greater accomplishment, as well as understanding that sometimes the player will get hit. Those times that they are hit with the softer ball allows the players to become less fearful of the pain and to understand that it is temporary. This allows them to progress to harder skills and to overcome their fears as they move forward.

**Emphasize tranquility over success.** Once there is a focus on quality, dichotomies tend to lose their impact and become less important. When tranquility is stressed above all else, as recommended and promoted in Zen philosophy, achievement in relationship to game test is simply better or worse, not pass vs. fail, not succeed vs. fail.
Additionally, achievement in relationship to the contest is simply greater or lesser difference, not win vs. lose, not victory vs. defeat.

A Zen-inspired coach would let things be and not overreact to what might be perceived as a failure, a defeat, or any other shortcoming within the game. The good strikeouts, the slightly less good strikeouts, the weak hits, the more solid hits should all be seen and experienced for what they are — success ~ failure, not simply failure or simply success. Similarly, the coach (and parents for that matter) should not overreact to differences between loud foul balls and the weak fouls. The solid hits in play and the bloopers that fall in should both be allowed to just happen as part of the larger experience of enjoying the sport, and playing within all the moments on the success ~ failure continuum.

In Zen-inspired youth baseball it is the coaches and adult spectators who set the tone of tranquility to help the young players enjoy the game with an inner calm and peace, which translates into a happy experience no matter what the outcome. A classic mistake is to categorize aspects of the game – the pitches, the hits, the runs and fouls – dichotomously as good vs. bad, strong vs. weak, successful vs. not successful, a winning hit vs. a weak hit. The list of dichotomous classifications in baseball is endless and in order to emphasize tranquility the coach (and the parent spectators) must steer clear of these either vs. or classifications.

Children and young teens quite often think to themselves, “I struck out; I failed” or heard, through the reactions of the coach and fans, “You got a hit. You succeeded.” The point is that these very dichotomies are what lead to a less than tranquil approach to the game for youths. It is only when we begin to move past the dichotomous concepts
that so much of the teaching aspect of coaching has been wrapped within (due to the predominate Western philosophical and historical approach to coaching) that we begin to take a truly Zen approach to guiding young players to learn the joys of baseball without the fear of “losing” or “failing.”

**Practice and Participation Guidelines Related to Zen as a High-Demand Practice**

**Emphasize the three most important principles of Zen training—repetition, repetition, and repetition.** As mentioned briefly above, at all levels of baseball repetition is emphasized. It is not a game in which skills are mastered quickly or in the short run. It takes years to get comfortable with the skill and sometimes it takes seasons to see progress. Baseball, to the Zen mind, presents a journey, quite possibly a lengthy journey. A classic mistake made by players, parents, and coaches alike, therefore, is to expect too much too soon of youthful players even as they get into high school at the varsity level. Frustration from a false, yet perceived lack of progress begins to dominate the experience of the young players when coaches (and parents) place too much emphasis on the pace of skill progression, or when too much comparison is made between the progression of skills between one player and another.

In Western approaches to the game, we want too quickly to bask in the glory, to be the hero, to get it right. Or, alternately, we set the bar too low. We want to be just good enough to get by. This is because Western societies are based on philosophies that often emphasize the importance of individual success and fulfillment. Both approaches are based on ego desire. In Zen-inspired coaching it is about always getting better and realizing there are no short cuts, as well as realizing it is always a journey with no linear
beginning and end. There is no such thing as a culmination or, put differently, as “good enough.”

Zen coaches are sensitive to interactions -- ball with glove, ball with swinging bat, glove with hand and arm, ball with target. Over and over the skills of the game need to be practiced in baseball. The high-demand aspect of the game allows children to experience the ground ball again and again. Through these experiences they gain knowledge of their limits and abilities and what they are capable of. They know this intuitively, not objectively or discursively. This increased intuitive knowledge is the beginning point for their next excursion into the game. Each excursion brings the player a little closer to being comfortable with the game and the skills required by the game. As this intuitive “feel” grows, what was once was impossible is now perceived as possible, even probable. Coaches then lead young athletes to the next hurdle in the quest to get better at the game without shaming them through this process via the more Western philosophical winning vs. losing or good skills vs. bad skills dichotomies.

Repetition also helps the mind quiet the chatter and the clutter. Constantly the young mind is bombarded by outside thought. “Here it comes, what do I do?” “Can I catch it” “If I miss, is the coach going to yell at me.” The constant barrage of a Zen meditation-like repetition experience, slowly but surely allows the player to empty the mind of those worries. Better and worse plays become part of the fabric of the game. No one failure, no one success should matter as such. “What is” begins to replace the ego-driven intentions of “what must be.” What actually happens begins to replace the ego-authored “scripts” of what ideally should happen. Baseball becomes a comfortable and safe place to be, and a place where it is fun to play the game.
Meditation-like Zen repetitions also help the young player overcome fear. The player, as he or she gains experience, moves from “please don’t hit it to me” to “I can do this!” Through Zen-inspired high-demand experience the player progresses through skill attainment without seeing it as a hierarchical mountain to be climbed but rather as an “in the moment” experience that lets go of obsessive thoughts of “I need to get better,” thereby lowering the fear experienced. Again, this frees their mind to experience the game in a new way, which is a more purely blissful and better Zen-led way. The repetitions build intuitive knowledge, lower the mental chatter, help reduce the fear so that the player can focus on the moment.

After years of practice the player, hopefully, can achieve a Zen-like state. He or she can play the game without thinking to move, but rather flowing seamlessly through the situation and reacting without even realizing they are reacting. The whole of the player’s experience comes together to allow him or her to live in the moment and just experience the game. The player moves fluidly to scoop up the ball and throw to the base seemingly all in one motion. This is where the young athlete’s skills and the game come together holistically and the world seems as one. In Western sport literature this is often treated as being in the zone. This is the Zen-like state the player is shooting for.

Emphasize the second most important Zen principle—patience. One aspect of intimacy with the sport of baseball that the coach wants the young player to grasp is the complexity of the moment, and this can only be achieved with a great deal of patience. Too often we experience the game as winning vs. losing, success vs. failure and forget about the action. The greatness of playing baseball is playing baseball. When
great games come about which are full of skilled play, are close, and have high tension, the game needs to be praised -- not the score or the winners, but the game. These games and opportunities do not often happen and this needs to be in the moment of what we explore. That is what a Zen-inspired coach should focus on.

Working with children and young teens always requires patience, whether it is in the classroom, in the home, or on the baseball field. To be sure, patience with children and teenagers is one of the greatest challenges adults face. Sometimes it just does not feel natural – just ask any parent!

The Zen-inspired concept of patience is very aptly applied to coaching youth baseball because it brings a level of calm to the experience. Calm approaches to coaching bring a more tender aspect to the experience for children and keeps the over-emphasis on machismo that has grown in Western sport out of the practice and playing experience. Children function better in calm environments and there is more and more noise, hyper-action and violence in television programming and video games that is removing more precious moments of calm from childhoods each day. When dichotomies are the main focus of coaching then young players feel pressure to win and be a success, and if that does not happen a great deal of angst and sometimes anger enters into the experience. The Zen-inspired patient and calm coach will not emphasize dichotomies, but rather will emphasize that developing skills in baseball takes time, repetition, and patience.

One of the classic mistakes made when taking a Western philosophical approach to coaching youths is to expect results too quickly, as mentioned earlier. Another common mistake is to set the bar too low just so “success” is guaranteed. This is
enhanced by the trend in American youth sports where all players are “stars” and everyone gets a trophy to back up that ego-driven concept. Zen-inspired coaches strike a balance between not overly pushing the players or not making them practice hard enough and do not worry about lowering the bar to guarantee the success side of a win vs. lose dichotomy. Again, it is always the coach who sets the tone of the practices and of the games. Patience is also very important when coaching youth baseball since there is a range in height, size, muscle and gross motor development, as well as a difference in the homes that the children come from. A boy who lives with several siblings in a home with parents who work long hours and who, subsequently, have very little time for tossing a baseball around has a very different experience than a boy whose father spends hours in the backyard working on the child’s pitching and catching, especially if that father played high school varsity and collegiately.

**Emphasize the third most important principle of Zen training—compliance.**

In Zen traditions, the Master is always in charge. The Master is respected. This respect is based on the fact that the Master is the one who knows where the Kingdom of special experience can be found—“he has walked the walk.” He points the way. Thus, anyone who would study with the Master needs to comply with his directions.

This does not mean that youngsters in American youth baseball need to bow to the coach, but it does mean that they should be ready to follow the coach’s lead. For example, a Zen-inspired coach can see the whole of the game experience and does not just focus on the singular play. The coach understands when it is appropriate to steal the base or not, when these ideas may escape the youthful player. As the players progress in
the sport they tend to pick up these ideas, but until that time the coach acts as the surrogate. The Zen coach emphasizes breathing instructions to lessen player’s stress, tools for focusing players’ attention, phantom swinging exercises, and other whole body practices that help with the game of baseball should be respected by the players.

Much could also be brought to coaching youths in baseball by looking at the benefits of Zen meditation practices. While it does not seem realistic to have youths actually learn to meditate, their coach can incorporate into their baseball practices and game warm ups aspects of meditation such as focusing on an object for one or two minutes to help the players relieve their minds of the stress of a game. They could also concentrate on their breathing for several minutes during a practice to help bring an inner focus to the “competition” experience. Another method that could be used by Zen-focused youth baseball coaches is a one-word cue or short phrase that helps the player to focus the mind. These one-word cues could be used to help players limit their distractions and to focus on the action at hand.

Another Zen-like method a coach can use is having youths participate in phantom swinging exercises – even having them do this with their eyes closed – which will give them a deeper experience and understanding for when they actually swing at a ball. This would help the players see the broader dimensions to the act of swinging. Once again, such exercises may seem odd at first, but support for the coach’s new Zen techniques coming from the parents will help the player’s be more accepting as well.

These are all unusual techniques for teaching baseball for parents and coaches used to Western approaches to the sport. Again, the players (and their parents) will need to comply with a coach who is trying these new Zen-inspired methods.
Practice and Participation Guidelines Related to Pragmatics

Emphasize the identification of what is uniquely problematic about baseball, particularly the elements that generate fear connected to dichotomies. Baseball is a unique game, one that has its own set of assets and liabilities. It stands to reason that the skills, dichotomies, and fears will be different for children as they learn different sports. In order to be an effective, Zen-influenced coach, this individual needs to know baseball. The techniques of the game and the words that go with them are diverse and difficult to understand outside of the game. So having someone who knows the game, understands the development the athlete goes through playing the game and what is important for the player to understand at each level is important to help the young player in his or her development.

A mistake Western-influenced coaches make in relation to this guideline is to treat baseball just like any other sport and to not properly learn details of the game. A Zen-inspired coach will take time to not only learn the game of baseball, but to also understand its many traditions, nuances, and, yes, even the game’s quirks. A Western-inspired coach would not put emphasis on teaching players to overcome the fears of the game, as has been discussed earlier. However, the Zen-inspired coach would recognize the issues related to the children’s fears and work to surmount those issues, whether it be through mind-relaxing techniques mentioned in the last section, or through repetition and other types of holistic physical ~ cognitive exercises described previously.

Emphasize what each child needs. This can be analogous to different sitting techniques in Zen meditation working differently for various individuals. Walking might
be a better form of meditation than sitting in the lotus position for some people. Likewise, each child is unique in their physical–mental composition. Because no players are cut in most youth baseball settings, team members in youth baseball often come with very diverse skill levels. To deal with this, as already mentioned, the Zen coach can break the team into groups based on similar levels of skill. The coach will want to group them so that they are fairly close to the others in their group in both skill level and maturity level. Sometimes the coach will need to look at confidence levels in players, or how quickly (or slowly) the youthful player becomes frustrated and angry and then group calmer players with those quick to become frustrated and angry. The players in each group will see others of like physical ability making similar mistakes and overcoming them, and conversely, the players who might be more skilled but quicker to anger will see a calmer approach to the game set by the example of a more passive player. All this will help the players’ confidence and help them progress towards a higher level of skill.

By breaking them into groups of like ability the coach can increase the repetitions for each group. These repetitions will be more appropriate and beneficial when tailored for the abilities of each group as well. For example, players with more advanced skill levels would not need to be limited to working with softer balls when they more appropriately could be working with harder balls. These groupings gently and peacefully (to use a Zen framing) serve the diverse needs within a team, which are often ignored. However, the Zen-inspired coach must also realize that differences in skill will always exist, just as the chances of being hit by a fastball will always exists. Also, it is natural for children to compare themselves in ability with other children, so it is important not to
frustrate or add to the child’s fear by grouping him or her with a much more advanced player. The Zen coach realizes that the kids cannot be protected in their homogeneous groups forever and that breaking the players into groups of like-skill level and maturity level is just an initial step, like using a softer ball. The next step would be to reintegrate the players into practicing together as a team, but with a Zen focus of no one player being better vs. worse than another player.

Emphasize drills and an attitude that produce the greatest gains in intimacy between the player and the baseball world. Zen-focused coaches need to be creative in avoiding tedium in the practices. Practices need to be fun for players. Otherwise the children will begin to lose interest in the sport. By using diversions in practice, the tedium can be reduced or eliminated. The Zen philosophy would even encourage coaches to incorporate what many would regard as a silly exercise, such as making the players hop around the bases on one leg, just to get them laughing, relaxing, getting their minds off of the stressful dichotomy of success vs. failure, and ready for more focused attention.

The effectiveness of coaches in promoting intimacy between the players and the game lies near the heart of Zen-influenced practice. The game of baseball is a special game -- some say even “magical,” that opens the doors to many unique experiences. The goal of a Zen-inspired coach is to teach the players, not just to be a better baseball player, but to be a better person. The lessons learned when coached by a Zen-focused coach are about life and the knowledge gained is about the self, the player ~ world, not just player ~ baseball world.
One of the ways the Zen-influenced coach can increase this intimacy for his or her players is by taking the time to show how special the game really is. Coaches often become coaches because of their relationship with the game – their love of the game. Zen-inspired coaches need to share this experience with the players. This mystical way of knowing the almost magical aspect of baseball that transcends a lot of everyday life will lead to a greater appreciation for the game by the young players.

Zen teachers often bow in the presence of their art or sporting environment. Herrigel’s Zen Master did this at the archery range. Bowing may not be appropriate in Western youth sport, but the humility and respect that informs the bow needs to be preserved by the Zen-inspired coach. Baseball, in a sense, is not just a game. It is everything... and nothing. So, just as Herrigel’s Zen Master bowed in the presence of the art of archery, Zen-focused coaches need to show that kind of respect for baseball as they bring youngsters into the much larger special world of baseball.

All those involved in youth baseball are connected to the game in one way or another. The kids wanted to play or were forced to play by their parents. The question is why? Why did they choose this game? What were their reasons? The Zen-inspired coach particularly needs to understand their connectedness to baseball, and they need to begin to answer those questions if they want to successfully bring Zen into their coaching methods.

Another way for the Zen-inspired coach to generate connectedness to the game is to have the players ask their parents and grandparents what connected them to the game. The children should ask their parents and grandparents why they feel a connection to the game and what were their experiences that made them feel that way. Once this happens,
the young players will hopefully see the game through different lenses and, in the
process, expand their relationship to baseball to the family setting far beyond the baseball
field.

This awareness will also begin to open the door to the special relationship they
can have with the game of baseball. The players will begin to create a special
relationship – a bond really – with the game. The Zen-inspired coach introduces the idea
that the field is a special place like no other. What can be achieved there can open the
players to greater experiences and bonds interwoven with the larger tapestry of the
memories of their parents and other relatives who came before them.

A fundamental way to respect the game is through moral thought and action. We
have already seen that these are two of the basic Zen foundations of living. They are
easily translated to the game of baseball. If the purpose of participation is holistic
growth, then the players should play with respect, and also with fairness and good
sportsmanship. Zen philosophy is a better foundation for these moral actions than
Western-influenced philosophy that emphasizes winning vs. losing and success vs.
failure, even though Western-inspired coaches normally teach fairness and good
sportsmanship. To have respect for the game is to have respect for its rules and the rights
of others. If this is a special place and a special game then we should not treat it
otherwise. We need to always embrace fair play, no matter the impact within the game,
especially at the youth level.

How can progress be considered meaningful if it was the product of cheating our
way through the game? How can we understand the degrees of change if we somehow
benefitted from a call that was not rightly ours to have? Our actions are constantly on display. How we play the game says a lot about us and how we view the game.

To cheat is to cheat the game, not show the game or the other team respect, as would be encouraged when framed in Zen tenets. To cheat is to cheat ourselves, Zen would argue. The game of baseball is about one person’s baseball abilities against another player’s abilities. It is about the best team winning. A person only understands his or her growth in skill in relationship to other players’ skills and growth. If we change that game to something different how can we understand our progress? We are short-changing the game and our own knowledge of our combined experience.

Ultimately, the target is us. It is about our progress, our skill in the game, but it is also about our progress as a person. While Zen-inspired baseball is about helping players achieve a connectedness to the game, it is also about changing people. The skills learned here can also be used in other aspects of life. We want to end the suffering in life. If we can do so in baseball then we have discovered a pathway to do so in other aspects of life as well. The ultimate project is to improve the self.

**Practice and Participation Guidelines Related to Diversity**

**Emphasize adaptation to the game, age, and needs of each player.** When using the term “adapt” or “adaptation” in this sense, we are talking about using Zen to break the canon. This has been discussed above, but it cannot be emphasized enough that Zen-focused coaches need to be able to change (adapt) practices and how they coach a game to meet the difference in physical size, strength, maturity levels and needs of each player. It is possible that a player with learning disabilities such as ADHD will need
extra attention from an assistant coach to keep that child physically moving when other players are on the bench. A Zen coaching method might be to have an assistant coach practice throwing off to the side with the child, or even asking the child to help keep statistics or run to fill up water bottles. Children also have different levels of sensitivity and coaches must be aware of the child who is more prone to crying or becoming overly angry and how to work with that child for purposes of keeping these emotions in check.

**Emphasize adaptation to promote concentration.** The example has already been presented of starting a practice by breaking the canon of physical drills and instead having the players practice a form of meditation by concentrating in silence on an object or a make-believe object, such as a moon. This forces the players to calm themselves and to discover an inner part of their mental state that they had not yet visited in their typical busy, active life. Other Zen-inspired practices can be used to help promote concentration in the players, including swinging at imaginary balls and even tossing imaginary balls. Certainly these Zen coaching techniques would break the canon of most coaching emphasizing physical skill development.

**Emphasize adaptation to reduce fear.** One example is that the canon says it is important to get on base. Thus, many children are taught the importance of the strike zone and getting walks. The Zen-influenced instructor will break the canon to help the child get over fear of swinging and missing the ball (getting a strike). The Zen-inspired coach would, instead, encourage the player to swing at everything, to swing lustily, with vigor. Baseball hitting is about swinging on time. Refinement of the strike zone can
come later when looking at coaching through the lens of Zen. This is analogous to Herrigel’s Zen master turning out the lights because it breaks the canon.

How can an archer learn to hit the target when the athlete cannot even see it? So adaptation in baseball is to swing at everything. This way the player gets used to swinging, and hitting, and also missing. “There, that wasn’t so bad, was it? You hit four, fouled off six, and missed five . . . and you survived it!” The Zen coach knows the child got in 15 lusty swings and to that coach it is much better than having a kid watch seven pitches go by and swing at only eight. The Zen-inspired coach does not care about the nuances of the strike zone, but rather wants the player to “swing, swing, swing.”

**Emphasize adaptation to promote harmony or oneness with equipment.**

Baseball is a game played with equipment. Baseball gloves cost anywhere from about $40 to more than $300. Bats cost even more. Used “bats that are broken in” often cost more than when they were new. There are specialized gloves for outfielders, catchers, infielders, and even specialized gloves for specific fielders such as first basemen. Bats, too, vary in length, weight, and shape. And there is the ball, a 5 ¼-inch, leather or plastic ball with big red laces, double stitched, a hard object that often is a cause of baseball anxiety and fear among young players.

The coach would be remiss if he did not try to create intimacy between the player and the equipment. The equipment is not only necessary, but often is a reflection of who we are as players. Gloves are needed to play, and we feel lost without OUR glove. We do not use just any old glove but our broken in model that we have had for years. The glove is a part of us as players. It gives us comfort like a teddy bear or favorite blanket.
While repetitions in practice help create the intimacy all players have with their equipment, it goes beyond that. The Zen-inspired coach teaches young players that they must not experience the glove as part of his or her playing baseball. The equipment must become part of the player experience. The glove does not catch the ball; the player catches the ball. Therefore, the glove is just an extension of the hand. It is the player’s hand in baseball. Thus, for the child who unifies with the glove, the child does not merely have or own a glove. Zen would say the child is the glove.

One of the Zen techniques a coach can use to help the players achieve this intimacy is by having the players carry the ball, mitt, or bat around. Even now you can catch me carrying a baseball around when I teach. I find my grip over and over. I spin the ball in the air and catch it without realizing what I am doing. Once in a while I drop the ball and mutter to the class “E-6” (error, shortstop). A few years ago my son used my infielder’s glove from my college days at a game. Like many kids he left the game to go home and forgot the glove. I was heartbroken. I bought my outfielder’s glove when I was in high school and still have it today, thirty years later. The glove my son lost I purchased to play second base during my college years and it was with me for 25 years. It is like losing a long-time friend, a part of me.

This type of intimacy is what the Zen-inspired coach is shooting for. Standing with glove throwing the ball against a wall or a spring back ball returner, catching the ball over and over – these are all repetitions Zen-led coaches should inspire their players to do. Doing this until the thought disappears, and the movements happen without thought. This is what players need to develop. The bat is carried and swung. The players achieve their grips over and over. They swing, swing again, and again. The Zen
The technique that might help would be for players to swing with a mirror so they can experience it in this way, then swing in the dark so they can experience that as well. Zen philosophy would encourage players’ need to be intimate with the tools of the game; Zen would say they need the equipment to become an afterthought, to be an extension of their own reach. Something the players experience, put in Zen terms, as “just being there.”

**Emphasize adaptation to cause less worry about success.** Another mistake coaches of youth baseball make may well be teaching baseball to youths the way the coaches themselves were taught. It is likely the coaches were taught the game within the Western philosophical framework of dichotomies with its attendant emphasis on whether a team won or lost. Zen-inspired coaching breaks away from this canon by directing the players’ from dichotomous thought and to thoughts of harmony with the game, inner calm, and reaching a level of joy by appreciating the game for the fun of playing the game. The diversity of Zen also allows for different approaches depending on the player and the skills each player exudes. Baseball is a game of differences, often minute differences. How we approach each player, each season, can be adapted by this Zen approach. Players respond differently based on their needs, and Zen does not promote a one-size-fits-all approach to life.

In baseball there are very diverse schools of thought on how to teach and perform each skill of the game. So one group of hitting coaches, for instance, will probably key in on very different skills than another group of mentors. Such differences fall to a second order of importance for coaches influenced by the Zen tradition. While some techniques, in fact, work better than others, the far more important issue is familiarity, comfort, and
focus of attention. As a Zen-led coach in youth baseball it is about opening the children’s minds to the concrete experiences of the game. The more experience they have, the better they are able to peacefully focus on the game’s various skillful acts, the more confident with the game the children become. As chaos theory suggests, small changes can have large impacts on children’s physical ~ mental skills. Thus, patience and increased familiarity may lead nowhere for a period of time, and then for no apparent reason make a large difference in the child’s relationship to the game. In Zen-inspired coaching it is best to allow children time and experience to work it out and to become more knowledgeable about the game and skills. The Zen coach cannot transmit intimacy. The Zen coach can only lead a child in that direction.

A way for a Zen-focused coach to incorporate corrections into the practice is to repeat the verbal and physical cues of the keys before and after working on the drill. As time goes on and the children’s experiences change, the cues will be incorporated into their movements. Once again, the coaches cannot force the change. They can only be the medium that allows the change to happen, according to Zen teachings. If major changes are needed, or the player is not doing so well adapting, quickly taking the child aside and reiterating the skill may be effective. This also should be limited in scope. Too much information lends to overload, and overload generates anxiety and fear in the young athlete. The coach needs to help the athlete overcome the fear and one way to do this is to help the child become comfortable with the game. Experience does this.
Practice and Participation Guidelines for Self-Transformation

Emphasize transformation in mental ~ physical ~ moral development. My high school baseball coach, who went on to be a successful college coach, used to say that baseball is 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical. Based on Zen principles, it may not be entirely accurate to divide up abilities this way, but it does show that the skills of baseball are more than just physical. Baseball is mental ~ physical. Since baseball is often referred to as a game of failure, our mental abilities to deal with the frustrations and failures of the game are definitely important. Zen focuses on transforming the self to accept what is happening, to understand the inner connectedness of it all. What a player learns from this game is directly relevant to life. Through our experiences we can begin to see the world differently and better. Aspects of practice, hard work, diversity, and calming of the mind can help us deal with everyday problems much easier. Baseball, in this sense, is a vehicle for teaching players better ways to experience the world and life—a richer, more full way of seeing things.

Baseball combines many different movement skills that help the player grow physically. Often athletes talk of “getting in the zone” or reaching “peak performance.” This is an example of when an athlete reaches an experience of excellence that they were unaware existed within themselves. Their self takes over and they become a Zen-like one with the game. Their reactions and movements seem to happen without thought as their lack of thought allows them to play without interference from forces that limit their abilities. When they relinquish control, as Zen teaches, when they do not force the action, they actually reach a higher level of performance.
From a moral perspective, baseball can be a great teaching tool. Coaches teach us to have respect for the other and to always follow the rules. We as players learn from a young age that the umpire is always right. Even if the umpire is wrong, the umpire is right. The acceptance of ideas such as “hard work pays off” and “cheaters never win” are reinforced every day across ball fields all over America. But there is also a deeper perspective to be learned from how the game is played. When a team has a big lead they do not steal bases or bunt. They do not try to blow another team out. The morals of the game reinforce general rules of fairness and justice, and refocusing the game from a Zen perspective stresses these moralities even more. These lessons that are naturally reinforced when seeing the game through Zen philosophy, are often ignored by coaches who see the game through the Western dichotomous win vs. lose perspective. Yet, these moral lessons are an important reason we teach baseball. This moral side of baseball, particularly when viewed through a Zen lens, also affirms a deeper involvement of the game of life and how we live it.

**Emphasize transformation.** All these lessons of the game help to transform the individual and how that person sees baseball. Not only that but it helps the player see the world differently than he or she did before. The Zen approach opens their eyes up to these lessons and the importance they have on how one lives their life. Understanding the teachings of baseball through Zen philosophy and practices opens the player to a more rich experience (in breadth and depth) in baseball, and in life, that becomes transformative and life changing.
Summation of Zen Practice and Participation Guidelines for Coaching Youth Baseball

While this is a long list of various Zen practices and participation guidelines for coaching youth baseball, the list could be even longer. As we look at the discussions in previous chapters on the over-emphasis placed on the importance of winning, understanding winning vs. losing from a Western perspective, the complexity of competition and associated meanings, and Zen Buddhism and holism, it is clear that these guidelines have only scratched the surface of what could become a much more comprehensive philosophy and approach to coaching youths in all sports. It is a strategy and perspective that takes into account the children’s innocent openness to the joy of sport, as well as their fears, their less mature minds, and their differences in development. Like the stages of meditation that can bring one to a state of nirvana, this study is merely the first step in realizing the full realm of possibilities that a Zen approach can bring to coaching youth baseball, as well as other youth sports.

The next section will go through the art of fielding ground balls as experienced by the player and how a Zen-inspired coach can lead his player in a positive direction. This will give coaches drills that allow their players to overcome four common dichotomies found in the game of baseball.

A Case Study – Fielding Grounders

The previous chapter discussed four common dichotomies players experience in the game of baseball. These four are used because of their commonality in the game, but there are many others that could have been chosen. These four are just examples of how players commonly experience the game and how Zen-inspired coaching could change
that experience. This section looks at the skill of coaching grounders, one of the most common experiences in youth baseball, but it would have been just as appropriate to choose hitting, catching flies, or throwing, among a myriad of other possibilities.

**Dichotomy 1: self vs. target.** The ball is hit. It is a ground ball coming at the player. The player sees the ball, and thinks, “I must catch it.” Often the player begins to question, “Can I catch it?” The young player can get particularly nervous which causes second-guessing of the player’s abilities. The player may think, “I am here and the ball is out there, coming at me; fast, too fast. Can I stop it?” This is the basic dichotomy experienced by youth players every day. They see the ball as separate, something to be managed, and as something to be controlled and overcome. That is the dichotomy coaches create. “Attack the ball!” they yell. If coaches were using Zen-inspired techniques that type of hyper-focus on the ball, and, thus, stressing the player’s separation from the ball, would not be used.

The ball is out there, but the target is here. The ball, the glove and the player must come together as one to be unified. If the fielder takes care of positioning, the rest takes care of itself. If the player is concentrating on what he or she must do, or how fast the ball is moving, his or her mind is now clouded, even distracted. If players worry about the dichotomy of self vs. target and how that is tied to success vs. failure they become even more anxious and failure becomes ever more likely.

At the moment the player recognizes the ball out there, suffering begins. The player desires to be successful, but fears failure. The tug of war between success and failure creates the suffering and the suffering blocks the player’s mind. The player
moves to a point to intersect the ball, and reacts to its speed and direction. If the player’s mind is clear -- with no thought to caching or committing an error, no desire, no fear -- then the player just reacts. Now the Zen-inspired unification happens; the catch happens.

As discussed earlier, this unification is achieved through repetition and through the loss of fear. The player literally needs to eliminate the concepts of “win” and “lose,” and “success” and “failure” from the player’s mind since those concepts only establish a base of suffering. As the player practices, he or she begins to quiet the negativity of failure, and ultimately begins to eliminate the fear connected with that state of suffering.

Starting with the softer balls being hit to them, the player learns to catch the ball. The more balls players catch the more comfortable they feel with the idea that they can catch the ball. While still using the softer balls, the coach can increase speed. Again, the objective is to get the player used to the fact that he/she can be unified with the ball, that speed changes little in the way we approach the catch.

As the player is progressing, undoubtedly, the player will get hit by a few balls. This is a good thing. Being hit by the softer ball will decrease the pain felt and the fear the player feels. One of the fears all players have is the fear of pain or injury due to being hit. If a player is hit enough times, it does not seem so bad; they get used to it. The player realizes it does not hurt as much as they feared or that the sting wears off after a few seconds. It is analogous to a figure skater having to fall many, many times before becoming world-class and able to compete at top levels. Once a baseball player gets used to the idea of being hit, which can be aided by coaches using drills of intentionally throwing softer balls close to the player’s body that sometimes might lightly hit the
player, then that player will begin to overcome the fear that the player created in his/her own mind.

After the players look to be more comfortable and more confident, then one of the soft baseballs can be substituted for the tennis ball. Again, fears will rise, but the players have more confidence in their skills. Working through repetitions, the players overcome their fear, quiet their minds and progress their focus. This is when they are introduced to hard balls or the normal baseball. Again, repetitions help the player get over his or her fear, and helps quiet the mind. At each level, the coach might start with the player getting hit with the ball, in a very controlled, safe way, of course. All this would help the young players overcome the fear of being hit and would not ignore those fears.

This progression may take several seasons and is not achieved quickly. The player learns by taking 10,000 grounders to overcome his fear. It is often said that it takes 10,000 hours for a player to reach a level of expertise. This is not accomplished in a short period. Because players may not practice between seasons the coach must accept that there will be players who take a step backwards while they are away from the game. The coach, as the Zen master, is only offering the path. The coach cannot force the players to get better; the Zen coach can only be the guide the player looks to for inspiration on their journey.

**Dichotomy 2: self vs. equipment.** Another common dichotomy is the one suffered between the players and their equipment. When players field a grounder, they experience it with an important piece of equipment – the glove. This piece of rawhide on the player’s hand is used to stop that round ball coming at the player, often at a top speed.
This glove becomes the tool use to accomplish players’ goals. The glove aids the player in catching a ball. This is the player’s experience.

The Zen-inspired idea of repetition is to create intimacy between the player and the object until it is no longer an object out there (which dissolves the dichotomy). Repetitions help the player accept the growing experience to the effect that the glove is unified with the hand and, thus, becomes an extension of the arm.

An existing Zen-like instruction often used when coaching players is to have soft hands. Soft hands recoil at impact with a ground ball to bring the ball in toward the body and ready the body for the throw. Coaches do not say have a soft glove. The Zen-like experience is to experience the glove to be like a hand; it is a unified glove ~ hand experience. The player no longer thinks, “I have to get the glove in front of the ball so the glove can catch it.” The thought process becomes more Zen-like as the player thinks, “I catch it.” Then the catch just happens.

Young players first experience the game with hard hands. They are immovable. Often the ball hits the glove and bounces out, away from the player because there was no give. It is similar to the ball coming into contact with a wall. The immovable object causes the ball to rebound away from the target. Through a Zen meditation-like repetition technique the player learns to give, to have soft hands, to caress the ball. This is why stressing a Zen-inspired coaching method is very important at the youth level when young children are first learning the game.

Some of the drills used to teach soft hands and to get the player accustomed to the glove ~ hand are to have the players experience fielding without gloves. A Zen-inspired drill would be to have players catch slow rollers with their bare hands. This allows the
players to become accustomed to moving their hands to intersect the ball. They will also learn to give so the ball does not bounce away. Another Zen-inspired coaching technique allows the players to catch the ball without the idea that the glove caught it. Their experience becomes thinking, “I caught it,” and then they just accept that it happened.

After players have become accustomed to this drill through repetitions, a flat board like “glove” can then be introduced to the practices. In the past, flat pieces of wood were used. Now stores make hard plastic shields with finger holders. The shields are flat and slightly larger than the hand. When the slow rollers come in the player must grasp with both hands and give against the momentum of the ball. Failing this the ball bounces away. Again, this Zen-like drill teaches the proper technique with the idea that the hand ~ glove caught the ball. The glove becomes the next extension of the practice. Once the movements are mastered then it becomes second nature and the catch becomes instinctive, reactionary; it just happens.

These techniques increase the repetitions all players receive and help to decrease their fear levels. Proper Zen technique helps the players gain confidence and knowledge. These repetitions also break down the dichotomous separation the players have with the equipment.

**Dichotomy 3: planning vs. action.** A common misconception in sport is that because a player planned it, the player controlled it. This idea that the player is in full control is just an illusion, when examining this from a Zen perspective. While athletes’ experiences within the game, over time, allow them to play with a sense of ease it does not mean they control the game. This is not control. The players’ ease allows them to
play with little or no fear and they begin to react to the action. Their experiences allow them to feel as if it has all happened before, but this is actually their Zen-like spontaneity of movement not impeded by thought.

This spontaneity is a result of the repetition of drills over many years. As players’ experience grows so does their knowledge base. This experience, as it becomes intertwined with players’ movements, relaxes the obsession of success vs. failure that infects the mind (and also causes our desire, which is the basis for suffering) making quieting of the mind impossible. With experience we quiet the fear of playing, of not knowing what to do. As players achieve this Zen-like level they see the game differently.

This level is achieved through the high-demand that Zen requires. There are no shortcuts, only days of drills built on days of drills. The players here react, fielding balls without telling themselves to field balls. The uncluttered Zen mind allows the game to happen with no interference.

**Dichotomy 4: process vs. product.** There are two dichotomies that exist under this category. There is process vs. product in tests (success vs. failure), and contests, (winning vs. losing). The main focus of fielding a grounder exists in success or failure, “did the player catch it or not?” The success or failure on each individual play likely will impact the end result: the winning or losing. Currently coaches and parents focus on the product, the results of the play, an out or a hit was made, or on the end result of the win or loss. There is little to no recognition of the process, the good or bad positioning, swings or plays.
In this case a Zen-inspired coach needs to give recognition to the fact that all success has failure in it and all failure has some success in it. When we make a play, good or bad, both success and failure are present, and often they are closely related. Winning and losing are part of the same continuum when viewed through a Zen lens. All wins have some winning and some losing and all losses have some level of winning as well as the losing. The two cannot be separated, especially in games of like-talented teams and those whose contest results are close.

In the game of baseball we sometimes see the second baseman make a diving stop of a hard ground ball, but he might have been unable to throw out the runner going to first (which would be considered a “failure” according to Western-inspired thought). Is this really a failure? Another time, a ground ball coming directly at the player might be bobbled, recovered, and thrown to first to barely get the runner at first, making the out (which would be considered a “success,” again according to Western thought). Is this really a success? Western-inspired approaches to the game would commonly say that it is a success in baseball because the out was made.

If the players, using a Zen lens, recognize that both plays have success and failure in them, then their reaction to those plays can be moderated. Failing to make the out after the diving catch the player is dejected. Then the “product” won out. However, the play was a great one. It is just that no out was recorded. The opposite is also true when the player makes the out. The play was bobbled and, therefore, not a clean play. In this case the out was still recorded, but not necessarily a “good” play. Recognizing both the success and failure in each of these plays is important when taking a Zen approach to the game.
Celebrating the wins and losses the same way can also help players focus on the Zen-like holistic continuum of the process and product. Recognizing how fantastic close games are -- both during and after the games -- is important. Too often the moment passes without the coach informing players of the type of game they are experiencing. In a close battle the Zen-inspired coach can assert that it is a great game, the kind of game players live for. The coach can emphasize that these games allow everyone to test himself (or herself) against a worthy opponent. The coach can also stress that winning ~ losing is in everything that is done. This Zen-focused coach can explain that the players need to appreciate the battle while they are in it by being more Zen-like and “in the moment,” not just after the game recognizing if they have won or lost.

With Zen as a philosophical framework for coaching the game, when the young athlete plays from the Zen technique of emptying the mind of all chatter, then they are no longer responsible for the action. If you did not control the game you cannot take credit for it; instead, it just happened. Great plays from a Zen perspective should not create swells of elation, and disappointing plays should not result in swells of disappointment or anger, according to Zen-inspired coaching. Coaches should remind players that Zen can guide the players to experience each play in the moment and within each moment there is great joy, depth, and connection to the whole game, and that there will be opportunity in the next moment.

One of the great opportunities for coaches is the quickness at which the game comes around. Players who make a great play or who have a mistake are likely to find themselves with another opportunity. If either of these plays infects their mind then the result could cloud their attitude towards the next play. This desire to make up for a
mistake or to replicate their great play leads to a clouded mind. This leads to thinking and suffering and a non-Zen-like result.

The Zen-inspired coach should always strive to encourage players to stop dichotomous thinking that creates the suffering. For example, the desire to win vs. not lose creates desire, which in turn, creates suffering and distracts the player from experiencing the game from a Zen-like state. Once one play has ended, successfully or not, it must be put aside in the player’s mind. The players all need to have a clear mind to move to the next opportunity, whether hitting or fielding.

Every movement in the game has success and it has failure, according to a Zen approach. Every game has winning and losing, again according to a Zen-inspired approach to the game. The important role the coach plays is to teach his or her players to recognize and accept both outcomes in the game from a calmer, more peaceful, and ultimately, more joyful frame of mind. Respect for the game forces the players to accept the outcome, look at how it was achieved, and to work on the next game.

**Concerns and Caveats of Zen-Inspired Coaching**

Some might argue that this Zen-inspired approach carries some significant limitations and liabilities. I would agree, even though I have personally employed many of the aforementioned strategies with considerable success. Nevertheless, there are some challenges that need attention.

First, it is best to not mention Zen when using the techniques, as parents and older children might interpret the methods as religious and a form of indoctrination of youths
into Buddhist traditions. It is the techniques of relaxation and focus that matter, not the source of the philosophy that guide these techniques.

A second liability might be concerns over the “high demand” aspects of Zen-inspired coaching, such as repetition, repetition, repetition. Therefore, a coach must be concerned that players might find some practices tedious, lacking in variability and fun. To overcome this concern, coaches should always keep in the front of their minds the need to not get too caught up in Zen practices and to be sure that they “shake up” practices, vary drills, add playful interludes, and the like to allow the youngsters to have fun and to get a break from some of the repetitions.

A third concern or liability of using Zen-inspired coaching techniques is worries that coaches who have no knowledge of Zen philosophy will not adopt these practices. I would argue that, like other changes to coaching methodology that have been developed through the years, if the techniques work then coaches will use them. They won’t care what the inspirational source is for those techniques.

A fourth caveat or concern might be worries that the interventions are still insufficient because Zen-inspired coaching techniques do not often create immediate results, but rather, happen over several years in order to create the progress desired. To overcome these concerns coaches should explain their techniques to both the players and the parents to help everyone involved understand that this approach is far more a long term strategy than a quick fix for insufficient baseball skills, and furthermore that changes in the skill of the players come about at different times in that progression. Also, if Zen-inspired techniques are used in a community or a school system, it would be important that coaches throughout the system understood and employed these
methodologies. The journey that leads to the transcendence of dichotomous worries might begin in T-ball and continue through high school and beyond.

A fifth concern and possible liability for Zen-inspired coaching would be that some players might not be able to adjust from a home environment that constantly over emphasizes winning vs. losing, to a new baseball experience that provides different messages. Therefore, these youngsters will not be able to reap the full impact of Zen methods since they are only offered for a portion of the player’s weekly experiences. But this concern, while valid, would be true of any intervention that tended to contradict common cultural traditions and meanings. Some youths, it could be expected, will gain more from the Zen character of their baseball experience than others.

Another concern might be lack of consistency among a coaching staff in applying Zen methods to the weekly practices and games. For example, a head coach might fully utilize Zen methods, while two other fathers who are helping with the coaching are taking players off to a batting cage or outfield, and stressing the trends of win-at-all-costs methods of coaching. This would obviously confuse players and, ultimately, undercut the rewards of Zen coaching methods. This problem speaks to the need for careful and consistent training of coaches. Undoubtedly, a Zen-inspired head coach will be teaching both the players and the other coaches how to grow under these different procedures.

Clearly there could be many other caveats and liabilities related to Zen-inspired coaching techniques. The ones mentioned above should help us see that no method is a panacea for positive change and that the introduction of Zen-inspired coaching techniques will require time, skill, and patience. Also, refinements and adjustment, consistent with the pragmatic spirit of Zen, are to be expected.
Conclusion

Baseball is a game of failure and it is a game of success. Winning is always present in losing, and losing is always present in winning. These are integrated experiences, homogenized wholes. In a game won seven to five, we succeeded seven times and failed five. It is odd that the Western mind accepts the success without also recognizing the failure. However, baseball is a game that should also transcend winning and losing, failure and success. Baseball has taken on an almost mystical quality in American culture that goes far beyond the end result of the game itself and transcends the human experience into something much more ethereal – like all mystical aspects of life. This is why we have seen so many romanticized films about the game come out of Hollywood in the past 40 years. These represent the transcendental nature of the game, why we play the game, and why we love the game.

All success ~ failure is determined by degrees, slight differences, in the moment-by-moment movements that make up the game. The action is continuous and the growth is continuous as well. Stopping at some point to determine and reify success or failure can be done, but it distorts the ebb and flow of reality. The opportunities continue to exist and the moment-by-moment dance with the game goes on. Over a season a team progresses and over the years talents/skills also develop and grow. How can any end point do justice to the changes that are experienced by the players? How can any end point explain the attraction to the game that we see in American culture that continues from season to season?

The moment-by-moment changes of the game are its foundation. The ever-changing motion from success to failure and back integrates the possibilities that all
players hold within them. The skills attained by the players open doors to newer and better experiences, and the games never really seem to end. Each swing is succeeding ~ failing, and every game is winning ~ losing. It is very important that coaches of youth baseball impart this attitude towards the game and by using a Zen-inspired approach to coaching, they can do this.

The season comes down to one final game, the championship. The two teams battling for the title have faced each other several times in the regular season. Each has won the same number of games. This dramatic championship game is won five to three on a walk-off home run. The team has just won the championship. Now what do they do? As the coach says, after a short celebration, “Boys, it is time to move on.” The Zen teacher is not inherently against celebration. He is against, ego-affirming celebration, lengthy celebration, “I did it” celebration.
Bibliography


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