



A World Without Mookies

→ BY STEVE RUSHIN

SPORTS AREN'T PERFECT, but they're the best thing man has yet devised to make marching-band music palatable. Without sports, your local news and weather at 11 would be followed by nothing, and given how terrifying the news and the weather are in 2016, a world without sports hardly bears imagining. But let's imagine it anyway.

Because sports never existed, you seldom hear the national anthem. The plural of *maple leaf* is *maple leaves*. And hail is only ever compared to citrus fruits.

Without sports, Wrigley is just a gum, Wimbledon is just a neighborhood, and NFL only resonates as the Amtrak station code for Niagara Falls. Without sports, you know far fewer Miceys and not a single Mookie.

Without sports, you have to drink 16 Bud Lights to drink \$9 worth of Bud Light. Sudden death is something dreaded rather than looked forward to. In this benighted world without sports, an anonymous senior citizen named Arnold Palmer always orders a half-iced-tea-and-half-lemonade instead of a Me.

Without sports, you don't know Dick—because Dick has no sporting goods to sell. Without sports, you haven't a clue how to pronounce *Krzyzewski* or *Tuiasosopo* or *Mönchengladbach*. *60 Minutes* always airs on time; the T-shirt cannon has never been conceived much less joyously discharged; and Drake has nowhere to go tonight.

Without sports, 406 means nothing, belly-itcher isn't even a word, and that one Spice Girl is known as Physically Fit Spice. Without sports, Wheaties is the Breakfast of Actuaries and Formula 1 is the first of many failed predecessors to Formula 409.

Without sports, there are no baseball caps, no draw-strung sweatpants, no striped tube socks, no high-top Chuck Taylors, no threadbare T-shirts that say THOME IS MY HOMEY. Which is another way of saying that without sports, I'm naked right now.

Without sports, at least some people who say "I would be dead or in prison without sports" are dead or in prison. Without sports, a pair of orderlies—speaking in soothing tones—gently leads Skip Bayless away when they find him arguing with a lamppost.

Without sports, there's nothing special about the first Saturday in May, the first Sunday in February or the entire month of March. Friday Night is not lit. Separation Saturday

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Ruth, Sandy
Koufax, Gale
Sayers, Terry
Bradshaw, Lynn
Swann, Fran
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What would
you miss
most in a
sports-less
world?

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discussion
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and Selection Sunday are Saturday and Sunday, respectively. Mr. October is the exclusive preserve of *Playgirl*.

Without sports, you wear a regular bra and drive a regular utility vehicle to go get a regular haircut at whatever they decided to call Sport Clips instead. All your heroic maladies—your athlete's foot, your jock itch, your sports hernia—are now just embarrassing afflictions, stripped of their gladiatorial implications.

Without sports, man's crowning achievements—slow-motion replay, sausage races and the Zamboni—were never crowned. Our great philosophers—Satchel Paige, Casey Stengel, Lawrence Berra—were never heard. Huey Lewis & The News had nothing to call their third album.

True, a world without sports is not all bad: tax money goes to education instead of billionaires, PED scandals aren't a thing, and you haven't had to hear "Rock & Roll Part 2" in 44 years. Mercifully, the golf joke does not exist. And yet...

Without sports, you've never eaten anything out of a plastic batting helmet. The actor Michael B. Jordan goes by Michael Jordan because he's the only Michael Jordan anyone's ever heard of. No one ever sings, "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?" because Joe DiMaggio never arrived in the first place.

There's no Cooperstown, no Colosseum, no *Caddyshack*. Without sports, Jackie Robinson, Babe Ruth, Sandy Koufax, Gale Sayers, Terry Bradshaw, Lynn Swann, Fran Tarkenton and Steph Curry all elicit the same response: "Never heard of her."

Without sports, you never played catch with your dad or H-O-R-S-E with your daughter. You never played Ping-Pong or beer pong or just Pong with your buddies. Your life has had 90% less confetti and not a single champagne shower.

Without sports, we live in a joyless, Gronk-less, Fosbury Flop-free world. It's Indianapolis without the 500, Manchester without the United. Life is a lot drearier. And "Do you believe in miracles?" is no longer a rhetorical question. □



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to this story," he says, "would be that I overcame my fears and got back on my bike despite flashbacks to the accident. And I'm some kind of hero because I was able to push through that fear. But, honestly, getting back on the bike was the easy part. If anything, I'm afraid I've seen too much."

Having sampled life outside the bubble, he's reluctant to step back in.

BACK IN Thousand Oaks, in that hotel, Gwen Jorgensen is gazing into the virtual-reality headset, studying the scary downhill above Copacabana Beach, the one she'll need to nail eight times to win Olympic gold. She might do just that.



REALITY CHECK

With a little virtual help, Jorgensen, who won in Copacabana last August (left), will win there again.

"In the beginning," said Zabriskie after the group disbanded, "she had issues with speed and was kind of shaky going downhill. By the end she was faster, much more confident, leaning the bike, almost diving into corners, to the point where it made me a little nervous."

"Yeah, this is the descent that I hate," says Jorgensen, before smiling and correcting herself: "I mean, that I like. No, that I love, and is now my best friend." □



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