



5. Becoming

My fitness program was never a fitness program. It was a campaign, a revolution, a conversion. I was determined to find myself. And, in the process, found my body and the soul that went with it.

I PROPOSE TO YOU that human enterprises succeed because they are absolutely rational or because they are just as absolutely absurd. Science is a success, but then so is religion. Knowledge succeeds, but so does faith. We usually act when something can be proven. But we act with equal frequency when it cannot. "Credo quia absurdum," said Saint Paul.

Just so are there two types of successful fitness programs. One is rational, practical, physiological; the other nonrational, mystical and psychological. One is obligatory; the other voluntary. One aimed at changing the person to fit the life style; the other aimed at changing the life style to fit the person. One is utilitarian; the other creative. One is work; the other play.

The first is successful because it is concerned with the result; the other because it is concerned with the process.

In one instance, the exercising person is satisfied with Dr. Cooper's minimal daily requirements; in the other, he is dissatisfied with his own maximum daily capabilities. In the first, there is a purpose, the product, which is fitness, but little or no meaning in how it is attained. In the second, there is meaning in every movement, but no purpose beyond the action itself; fitness is

merely a byproduct. The first pursues an ambition; the second pursues a dream.

The first program is for unfit, out-of-shape people with their backs to the wall. They know what they want to do, but are no longer able to do or enjoy it. They have finally and irrevocably had enough of how they feel and look and live out their lives. They are now ready to repent of past physical sins. Willing to obey the Ten Commandments of fitness. Anxious to follow the path of rectitude, provided vigor and energy lie at the other end.

You would think that such sensible decisions come easily. Nothing could be further from the truth. People just do not do things because they are good for them. And are even less inclined to do so when they enjoy doing the opposite. People accept the rational, practical, physiological only when it dawns on them that life any other way is a waste. Only then will they agree to a program which to them is a mindless, inconvenient and boring use of their time.

The other program is for unhappy people who find that it is life that is mindless, inconvenient and boring. Common-sense programs are of no help here. Only something that is nonrational, mystical and psychological can benefit them. Only something that is spontaneous and creative and playful will be effective. These people are looking for no less than an alternate way of living. Looking for a leisure-time activity to involve them completely and give them a new life style. Looking to become a true believer, to be struck like Paul on the road to Damascus with a new passion to replace the old one.

That passion of profession or career had changed, as Jung predicted, first to becoming a duty and now to being a burden. Life had become, as James Michener suggested, a falling away, a gradual surrender of the dream. What is left? "To live one's days," writes Bill Bradley, "never able to recapture the feeling of those few years of intensified youth."

Such pessimism is unwarranted. This fifty-eight-year-old man who has rediscovered play and sports can attest to that. It was

58 yrs.

simply enough for me to ask the question "You have one life to live. How do you want to live it?" and then come up with an absurd answer: "As a distance runner." With that decision, I awakened that passion, relived my dream, recaptured my youth. I re-entered my life through re-entering my body.

And so my fitness program succeeded because it was absurd. It was nonsense for someone my age to decide to become an athlete. Purely preposterous to concentrate the intensity and involvement that I once felt for the life of a physician into the life of the distance runner. Ridiculous to make running my vocation and medicine my avocation. But then my fitness program was never a fitness program. It was a campaign, a revolution, a conversion. I was determined to find myself. And, in the process, found my body and the soul that went with it.

For me, medicine was an illusion that had failed. I was seeking a new world, where I could live and create my own drama, and not play with the meaning of life. I found it in running.

So when you see a jogger out on the roads, you can never be quite sure what is going on in his or her head. Whether the reason for running is reasoned and practical and altogether a matter of just getting it done. Or, on the other hand, whether this child-like foolishness is the focal center of the runner's day. And running is the answer to the crucial question: How do you want to live the rest of your life?

A Canadian observer, John Sansom, has come up with a new solution to the physical-fitness problem. Religion. He suggests that we need more than a commitment to physical fitness for its own sake. We have to act on our religious beliefs (or a belief in a practically achievable Utopia) that regard bodily fitness as an essential part of life style directed toward a single all-important goal.

Will this be the answer? Jogging to eight-o'clock Mass? Cycling to temple? Doing circuit training before the Unitarian services?

I think not.

Every man is religious. Every man is already acting out his compelling beliefs. Religion is not something you belong to, or accept, or think. It is something you do. And you do it every waking minute of every day. Religion is the way you manifest whatever is urgent and imperative in your relationship to yourself and your universe, to your fellow man and to your Creator. Every act is a religious act.

That act may begin in dogma, but it ends in the deed of a unique, unprecedented and nonrecurrent individual. Religion or agnosticism or atheism may speak authoritatively to us about our bodies, but, whatever our persuasion, we will practice it only according to our inner compulsions and outer design. We are made for happiness and joy ("To miss the joy," said Stevenson, "is to miss all"), but we must pursue it in different ways. Fitness may not be one of them.

My design is thin and linear. I am a nervous, shy noncombatant who has no feeling for people. I do not hunger and thirst after justice. I find no happiness in carnival, no joy in community. I am one with the writers on *The New Yorker* whom Brendan Gill described. They touched each other only by accident, were secretive about everything, and never introduced anyone properly.

I am an intellectual. This does not mean I am intelligent, but that ideas are more important to me than people. My world lies inside of me, as it does with most people with my slight build. And that world and its completion depends on my physical fitness. In the perfection of my body lies my own perfection.

Fitness is my life; it is indispensable. I have no alternative, no choice, but to act out this inner drive that seems entirely right for me.

A majority of my readers will, I suspect, never feel that necessity, that urgency. The happiness, the joy they are born for, can be attained without it. They belong to one of the other two great races of men. Races with fundamentally different bodies and dif-

RELIGION

ferent temperaments, different life styles, and different religious expression.

The first of these races are strong, muscular people who are aggressive and insensitive to pain, both in themselves and in others. They find fulfillment in action, and seek to control people and events and things. Once athletic, they no longer need their bodies for their eyeball-to-eyeball confrontations. Where once they settled arguments with their fists, they now use their irresistible energy and moral courage. Physical fitness is no longer a priority.

The middle third are the round, pleasant people who love to have their arms around each other. They are generous and affable and quite close to being fat. Their bodies are for eating and drinking and company and family gatherings. Kierkegaard, another loner, once described such a man: "The ideal Christian is happily married, looks like a cheerful grocer, and is respected by his neighbors." For this race, fitness is irrelevant.

So I won't talk to you about fitness if you promise not to give me the kiss of peace or a membership blank to the Holy Name Society.

I gave a lecture on physical fitness recently at the Carrier Clinic, a psychiatric institution near Princeton. In the discussion that followed, one of the staff asked me, "Will jogging prolong your life?" I looked at him, my colleague in medical orthodoxy, and answered, "Will psychiatry?"

The answer was unpremeditated. A backlash against being required to answer a question I consider both irrelevant and immaterial. What runner cares whether running will prolong his life?

Will it? I don't know and I don't particularly care. On the other hand, running certainly does something to my body. But what exactly does it do? A few years back, I decided to find out. I went to a local community college for a fitness test. My maximum oxygen capacity, it turned out, was fifty-four volumes per cent, considered excellent for a twenty-eight-year-old.

Apparently, running has given me an exceptional level of fitness. But what else? Has it prolonged my life? Pure absurdity. My physiology may be that of a twenty-eight-year-old, but I still have a fifty-eight-year-old body. I have my vigor, both physical and psychic, but the body ages relentlessly. My hairline recedes. My eyesight diminishes. And no one can persuade me that I have, at this date, a twenty-eight-year-old heart or blood vessels.

Yet something good is happening. Checking out as a twenty-eight-year-old must mean something. It does. It means that despite my years I am still an athlete. That running has gotten me to my lean body weight and to my personal cardiopulmonary best. Taken me to my physical peak. Because of my running, I am living at the top of my physical powers.

Now, to some that may mean that life will also be prolonged. Not to me. We are born, I suspect, with a built-in longevity quotient, which we can diminish but not increase. We are born, it seems to me, with an appointed time when noise will develop in the signals sent by our messenger RNA. When the song the molecules sing will no longer be heard by the cells. Disease, disintegration and death follow.

We can apparently hasten the process, but not retard it. Medical progress has gone through its finest hour and has had little impact on our life span. It is interesting that the Italian painters of the Renaissance had a life span of sixty-seven years, only a few less than medicine can produce in this nuclear age.

So let us forget about longevity. Get away from the idea of prolonging life. Let us realize the truth of Thurber's dictum "There is no safety in numbers—or in anything else." Despite exercise, diet and abstention from all the vices, we will die in our appointed time. That should not concern. It is what happens from now until then that is important.

Now rephrase that question. "Can running, or any strenuous form of play, improve my life?" This allows an answer. An answer which is clearly affirmative, if only because running con-

different race of human

prolong life?

centrates on positives rather than negatives, emphasizes doing rather than not doing, and above all makes the person responsible for what he is doing.

The medical profession would like nothing better than to have all of us acting responsibly, taking a part in our own fate. The scientists think they can do better only if we do better. "The next major advance in the health of the American people," says Dr. John Knowles of the Rockefeller Foundation, "will result only from what the individual is willing to do for himself."

When I run, I am willing to accept that responsibility. But I also discover that to be responsible implies the ability to respond. To take care of my body, I must be able to listen to it, and to hear what it says.

In this continuing dialogue between me, the runner, and my body, I become more and more healthy-minded. I become eager for more training, more discipline, more self-control, seeking inside of me the person George Leonard called the ultimate athlete. All the while knowing, as Leonard suggests, that I am playing the ultimate game, which is life.

And in life, you remember, it is not how long you lived, but how you played the game.

A daily jogger has written to me in frustration because medical science has failed to come up with conclusive proof that jogging will prevent heart disease. Why jog, he asks, if there is no definite evidence that jogging will thwart a heart attack?

The answer, it seems to me, is that we should do so for more important and urgent and compelling reasons. We jog, play tennis, cycle, swim, hike, hunt, ride horses, or whatever because they have to do with the quality of our lives than the quantity. "I know only two things," a student said to Rollo May. "One, I will be dead someday; two, I am not dead now. The only question is what I shall do between those points."

Sport and play and exercise are essential to that doing, that being, that becoming. They are concerned with physiology, not

disease; with health, not heart attacks; with fitness, not the lessening of hypertension, strokes or other human ills.

Sport and play and exercise are therefore vital to the process of maximizing ourselves and reaching the top of our physical powers.

We should not underestimate the importance of this in the full life. Training the body was an essential part of Plato's prescription for education. Education, he said, should train the body and mind as one. Only then can the body which is the source of energy and initiative be put in harmony with the mind which is reason. "The body," wrote Ortega, "is the tutor and the policeman of the spirit." It is the fit body, the body at the height of its powers, the body with range and daring matched with maturity that is the best teacher, the best disciplinarian.

Jogging or whatever our sport is, therefore, is the way we move from actuality toward our potential, toward becoming all we can be. At the same time it will fill us with uneasiness, with what Gabriel Marcel called inquietude, the recognition that there is work to be done to fulfill our lives. And it allows us to see, as Theodore Roszak has recently suggested, that our most solemn, and pressing, and primary problem is not "original sin" but "original splendor," the knowledge of our potential godlikeness. "We grow sick," writes Roszak, "with the guilt of having lived below our authentic level."

Can we reach this level or even attempt to reach it without sport and play and exercise? Can we hope to have the necessary energy and reason, the harmony and imagination without training and disciplining and enjoying our bodies? That is for each of us to decide.

For myself, the usual arguments for exercise are pathetic representations when placed beside this holistic approach to the human condition. "My troubles are two," sang the poet Housman. "The brains in my head. The heart in my breast." It is the day-to-day living with these troubles that makes us realize the importance of health and fitness. Not perhaps with making it easier. In

fact, it makes living more demanding. The athletic individual can be more conscious of choice, more aware of the dangers of freedom, more awake to what the French call *difficulté d'être*.

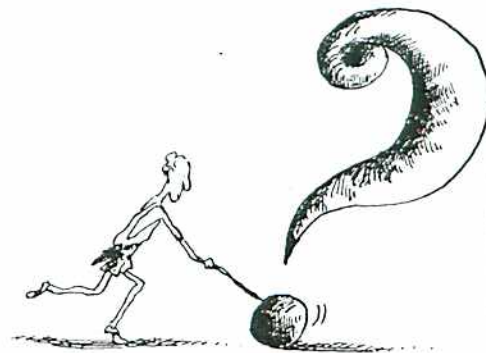
Each of us must face this difficulty in being every conscious moment. And it is for each of us to discover how best we can handle this encounter. And here it comes down to whether you are an Aristotelian who sees the law outside himself or a Platonist who would look for it within. Should you wait for proof, or act out what your internal message tells you?

The message I get from consulting myself is clear. First I ran from instinct. Later I was forced to exercise in Phys. Ed. Even later I came to run and exercise because it was prescribed by authorities. But finally I have come to run because it is the right and true and just thing for me to do. In the process I may be helping my arteries and heart and circulation as well, but that is not my concern.

My true aim now is a state of fitness prior to and unrelated to sickness or disease. My true task, to live at my authentic level. My true goal, to reach my original splendor.

Run for my life. You had better believe it.

6. Playing



Run only if you must. If running is an imperative that comes from inside you and not from your doctor. Otherwise, heed the inner calling to your own Play. Listen if you can to the person you were and are and can be. Then do what you do best and feel best at. Something you would do for nothing. Something that gives you security and self-acceptance and a feeling of completion; even moments when you are fused with your universe and your Creator. When you find it, build your life around it.

SHAKESPEARE WAS WRONG. To play or not to play: that is the real question. Anyone with a sense of humor can see that life is a joke, not a tragedy. It is also a riddle and, like all riddles, has an obvious answer: play, not suicide.

Think about it for a minute. Is there a better way than play to handle "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," or take up arms against a "sea of troubles"? You take these things seriously and you end up with Hamlet—or the Nixon Gang, who came back from World War II, wrote Wilfred Sheed, "talking about dollars the way others talked about God and sex."

Neither of these ways works. Neither will bring us what we are supposed to be looking for, "the peace the world cannot give." That is also part of the riddle. You can have peace without the world, if you opt for death. Or the world without peace if

paradox
 you decide for doing and having and achieving. Only in play can you have both. In play, you realize simultaneously the supreme importance and utter insignificance of what you are doing. And accept the paradox of pursuing what at once is essential and inconsequential.

Play, then, is the answer to the puzzle of our existence. The stage for our excesses and exuberances. Violence and dissent are part of its joy. Territory is defended with every ounce of our strength and determination, and moments later we are embracing our opponents and delighting in the game that took place.

Play is where life lives. Where the game is the game. At its borders, we slip into heresy. Become serious. Lose our sense of humor. Fail to see the incongruities of everything we hold to be important. Right and wrong become problematical. Money, power, position become ends. The game becomes winning. And we lose the good life and the good things that play provides.

PLAY
 Some of those good things are physical grace, psychological ease and personal integrity. Some of the best are the peak experiences, when you have a sense of oneness with yourself and nature. These are truly times of peace the world cannot give. It may be that the hereafter will have them in constant supply. I hope so. But while we are in the here and now, play is the place to find them. The place where we are constantly being and becoming ourselves.

Philosophers have hinted at this over the centuries. Now the theologians are taking a hard look at the thought that we must become as little children to enter the Kingdom. If so, there is nothing more characteristic about children than their love of play. No one comes into this world a Puritan. If there is anything children care less about, it is work and money and power and what we call achievement.

We watch and envy as they answer the call "Come and play."

What happens to our play on our way to becoming adults? Downgraded by the intellectuals, dismissed by the economists, put aside by the psychologists, it was left to the teachers to de-

liver the *coup de grâce*. "Physical education" was born and turned what was joy into boredom, fun into drudgery, pleasure into work. What might have led us into Eden led us into a blind alley instead. And simply changed our view of the universe.

A universe where we are to play and enjoy ourselves and our God is one thing; a universe that is a large, forbidding place where we have to fight for everything we get is quite another. A universe where it is either "us" or "them" will certainly make us seek peace in another world. Life under those circumstances is just as Samuel Beckett described it. "A terminal illness."

Play, of course, says otherwise. You may already have found that out. If you are doing something you would do for nothing, then you are on your way to salvation. And if you could drop it in a minute and forget the outcome, you are even further along. And if, while you are doing it, you are transported into another existence, there is no need for you to worry about the future.

When Dean Caldwell and Warren Harding reached the top of El Capitan a few years back, the nation breathed a sigh of relief and turned to other matters. Why anyone would spend twenty-seven perilous days climbing 3,400 feet of perpendicular rock is beyond the comprehension of even ordinary humans, much less those of us who get vertigo hanging curtains.

"Why climb mountains?" is a question which, it turns out, cannot be satisfactorily answered even by mountain climbers. Everyone, course, attempts an answer. But all freely admit that the whole truth is not there. The whole truth, they imply, cannot be captured.

Participants in the "blood sports" are equally unsure. Forget about Hemingway's moment of truth. It doesn't even enter into novelist James Michener's explanation of why he ran with the bulls at Pamplona. Two men met death within feet of him. Yet he made himself go back a second and a third day. Why did he and the crowds with the rolled-up newspapers (to touch the bull—and claim the touch) come to Pamplona?

WHY CLIMB MOUNTAINS?

Because, Michener claims, throughout history a certain kind of man has wanted to test himself against the most demanding experience in his culture. Michener characterizes this motive as idiotic, jejeune, unrewarding and senseless. But notes that you frequently find that it is the best men who insist on taking the risks. "In our age," he says, "you can climb Everest, fly to the moon, or run with the bulls of Pamplona."

For those of us who are "endlessly catching trains," the thought of testing ourselves against the most demanding experience in our culture can be a new and exciting idea. But the streets of Pamplona are as distant to us as the Sea of Tranquility, and even the mention of Everest causes nausea. Paradoxically our intuitive urge to expand ourselves, to test our limits, is blocked by our instinctive reaction that the way of Michener and his Spanish friends is not our way.

What our instincts (and athletes and sports psychologists) tell us is that sports and athletics will show us how to satisfy the main urges of this generation: to possess one's experience rather than be possessed by it, to live one's own life rather than be lived by it—in fine, to become all you are. Up until now that has always meant your brain. No more.

"As Prometheus (sometimes called the Greek Christ) sought to stretch the capacity of mankind," writes West Coast psychologist Wilfred Mitchell, "so do athletics."

One who has found sport stretching his capacity is Joe Henderson, the running editor of *Runners' World*. Henderson feels he can't answer the why-I-run question any better than others. But he tries. "I write," he says, "because the thoughts inside have to be put in more visible form. I run because it's inside pushing to get out."

Running is a total experience. That which some of us do best just as others find their satisfactions and fulfillment in skiing, mountain climbing, bicycling, snorkeling, pitching or what have you.

The experience is one that proceeds from one level to an-

other. It can be merely physical fitness (which is like taking up painting to improve the strength of your arm). Or distraction: "I think" said Tug McGraw, "the reason I like baseball so much is because when I come into a game in the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, none out, and a one-run lead, it takes my mind off all us screwed-up people." Or religious: "Surfing is a spiritual experience," says Michael Hynson, one of the world's top surfers. "When you become united with a wave, you lose your identity on one level and make contact with it again on a higher plane."

At one end of the spectrum you find a former college cross-country runner stating that the "opportunity to encounter and deal with pain is one of the aspects that makes the running experience ultimately so satisfactory." At the other, you hear Dick Cavett, a dedicated snorkeler, report, "Snorkeling is a rebirth. You just hang there in liquid space like an irresponsible fetus. For me it combines the best features of sport, sleep and religion."

This quiet revolution is spreading over the land. The rarity of the true dropouts should not fool us. For each ski-bum who belongs to the mountains there are thousands who already know that's where they come alive. For every runner who tours the world running marathons, there are thousands who run to hear leaves and listen to rain and look to the day when it all is suddenly as easy as a bird in flight.

For them, sport is not a test but a therapy; not a trial but a reward; not a question but an answer.

The first and basic commandment for health and longevity is the following: Pursue your own perfection. No one will have difficulty with this dogma. But as usual with dogma, we begin to have dissensions when the theologians start interpreting it. Then we become schismatics and heretics and start religions of our own. In health, the main problems with orthodoxy are with the word "exercise."

TESTING OUR LIMITS

PLAY (with pleasure)
I am ready to start a new religion, the first law of which is, "Play regularly." An hour's play a day makes a man whole and healthy and long-lived. A man's exercise must be play, or it will do him little good. It may even, as we see regularly in the press, kill him.

I have scientific support for my position. Recent studies in both England and Ireland have shown that hard physical work did not change the coronary-risk factors or heart disease in more than thirty thousand men. However, in the same group, hard physical activity during leisure time was accompanied by a significant reduction in risk factors and heart attacks. Not by hard work, but by swimming and running and heavy gardening, and by tennis and squash and handball, and other forms of play, these men achieved health and a long life.

So it is not effort that reduces heart attacks and degenerative disease. If it were only effort, then effort on the job would do the trick. So it is not running, but running that is play, that is necessary. Exercise that is work is worthless. But exercise that is play will give you health and long life.

Exercise that is not play accentuates rather than heals the split between body and spirit. Exercise that is drudgery, labor, something done only for the final result is a waste of time. If I hated to run and ran only for longevity and was killed by a truck after five years at the sport, I would have a right to shake my fist at Providence, or at the doctor who advised it.

It is not the runner, but those impersonating the runner, who is at hazard. Those with the "hurry sickness." Those aggressively involved with achieving more and more with less and less time. Those who are always competing with or challenging other people. "Only the sick man and the ambitious," wrote Ortega, "are in a hurry." It is these people who use jogging to escape from death who find it taking them to their appointment in Samarra.

What, then, should you do? Run only if you must. If running is an imperative that comes from inside you and not from your

doctor. Otherwise, heed the inner calling to your own play. Listen if you can to the person you were and are and can be. Then do what you do best and feel best at. Something you would do for nothing. Something that gives you security and self-acceptance and a feeling of completion; even moments when you are fused with your universe and your Creator. When you find it, build your life around it.

"Therein lies perfection," said Marcus Aurelius, "to live out each day as one's last." That is why I run and will always run. I have built my day and my life around it.

There is no better test for play than the desire to be doing it when you die.

as yes is to if, love is to yes

—E. E. CUMMINGS

If sport had a feast day, it would be Christmas. It is the day that speaks to man the player. Homo ludens is what Johan Huizinga called him. To differentiate from Homo sapiens, man the thinker, and Homo faber, man the maker.

Christmas tells us once again that play is a proper activity of man. It reminds us that fun is something philosophers cannot explain or understand, and insists that life is a game in which all can be successful.

A lot of this is not new. Plato in his *Laws* says, "Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, singing and dancing." This idea was also prominent during the Renaissance. But those enemies of man and his body, moral zeal and intellectuality, moved in during the Reformation, and with them a decline in play.

The nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution were even worse. "All Europe," writes Huizinga, "donned the boiler suit." Utilitarianism, efficiency and educational aspirations almost wrecked the play spirit.

But there is hope. We still have the poets, the children, the athletes. And sports.

The intellectuals who look at sport start with the assumption that it must serve something that is not sport. They see its useful functions of discharging surplus energy and providing relaxation, training for fitness and compensation for other deficiencies. What they don't see is that play is a primary category of life which resists all analysis.

Play, then, is a nonrational activity. A supralogical nonrational activity in which the beauty of the human body in motion can reach its zenith. Just as the supralogical feast of Christmas confirms man's unique value and destiny. So the intellectuals are probably as upset with play as the theologians are with Christmas. Men having fun is as mystical and supralogical as the Word made flesh.

Fortunately, mysticism doesn't come hard for the common man. "History unanimously attests," wrote G. K. Chesterton, the master of paradox and therefore the master of Christmas, "that it is only mysticism which stands the smallest chance of being understood by the people."

Philosopher Jean Houston has observed, "We tend to think of the Faustian man, the one who fabricates, manipulates, seduces and ends up destroying. But the new image will be man the creator, the artist, the player."

The first Christians told us all that. The game plan had been changed. When the angel said, "Rejoice, be not afraid. I bring you good news of great joy," we knew that everything was going to be different. The world, which had moved from "if" to "yes," was now moving on to love.

The game would be for everyone. And the arena would be the world. And the good news is that man will eventually triumph. All of us for this once are going to be on the winning team. And not only that. All of us can be great players.

The first Christmas says with Shakespeare, "What a piece of work is man. How noble in reason! How finite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable!"

Homo ludens knows this. Oh, what pieces of work are Mu-

hammad Ali, Jimmy Connors, O. J. Simpson and Kareem Jabbar! No sports fan needs to be educated about man's potential. Or the irrational elements that go into the intensity of the game. Or about the community of the crowd.

The sports fan knows all this and suspects that there is nothing more spiritual than the human body. Knows that nowhere is every man given his dignity as he is on the playing field. And instinctively feels that somewhere here is the news of the first Christmas.

Those of us weary and discouraged by the front-page tragedies caused by Homo sapiens and the ecological disasters of Homo faber can turn for uplift to the sports pages and know that there every day is Christmas. A Christmas foretold in the Book of Proverbs:

"I was with Him forming all things, and was delighted every day, playing before Him at all times; playing in the world. And my delights were to be with the children of men."

Who speaks for play? These days, almost everyone. The physiologists and the physicians, the psychologists and the psychiatrists, the economists and the sociologists all champion play.

Play and sports and the use of the body are becoming respectable. Play is good for losing weight and reducing our risk factors. For relieving stress and returning us to work relaxed. Play maintains our health and promotes our longevity. Compensates for needs not met at work, and provides a harmless way to vent antisocial emotions. Play, the experts say, is a necessity in a leisure society.

But these acceptable and respectable reasons for play are not the real reason we must play. The reason for play is much more radical than the scientists and thinkers presume. The reason for play is to be found in our reason for being. And, therefore, with the problem of God.

The problem of God has moved from the ancient question "Does God exist?" past the medieval inquiry, "What are his at-

tributes?" to our present dilemma, "Why did He create the world?" Our difficulty now is the inability to explain the existence of the world and therefore ourselves. We are unable to define our purpose, to show how we serve, to demonstrate our usefulness.

The best answer, it seems to me, is to consider Calvin's thought that the world is "*theatrum gloria Dei*." We are here, therefore, to glorify God. And that we do this by glorifying the God who is Himself a player. Who created in joy, in play, in sport.

Calvin, the Sunday bocce player, may not have thought of it this way, but it does answer today's question. We are in this world to give glory to God and rejoice in our own and God's existence. And we do this in play.

Children, who are athletes and poets and saints and scientists all in one, do this naturally. They seldom question themselves about purpose. Rarely wonder whether or not they are useful. Practically never consider service and respectability. These latest arrivals from Paradise are nevertheless examples of pure unity of heart and soul and brain united with a body which is almost always in action. And that action is play.

What the child lacks is wisdom. Undirected action is not enough. When we become adults, we realize this. "Fight, do not pray," advised Plutinus. "Play, do not pray," we might say. But first we must know our fight, our action, our play. The child does not yet know the role he plays in his own drama. We must find that without losing the gift childhood provides, the gift of play. Without becoming what Erikson defines as an adult: "a commodity-producing and commodity-exchanging being."

The aim of education is to avoid this. It is to help the child become an adult but at the same time to find the secret of allowing the adult to remain a child. We should be children grown but children grown wise and discovering the significance of our peculiar union of flesh and spirit. Children grown wise and knowing that the answer to the question "What are we doing here?" is "I am."

The center of that existence is my play. From it springs all other activity. Sport and play are the stuff bodies are made of. They are also the stuff that makes the person and the self. My running enables me, as Norman O. Brown wrote, "to live instead of making history, to enjoy instead of paying back old scores, to enter the state of Being which is the goal of Becoming."

True, running does not fill my day. But it influences the rest of what I do and how I do it. From it comes my role and the style in which I play it. In it I find myself and my design. I start in play, use myself increasingly, and end in joy.

You may notice that play can be painful and strenuous and dangerous. It can demand endurance and suffering and perseverance. It can ask the most that a person can give. It presupposes an absence of greed and vanity and the appetites that remind us we are mortal. Play, you see, can be more difficult than work, and no easy task for an adult.

It is, however, worth every effort. What better to be than a player in the hands of a playful God?

I love them all. Love every Buck, every Celt. Love Kareem and Oscar and Mickey Davis; Perry and Warner and Bobby Dandridge. Love Cowens and JoJo and John Havlicek; Silas and Chaney and Baby Face Nelson. I love Tom Heinsohn and Larry Costello. I love them all. Because these men, doing what they do best and doing it superbly well, proved to me that sport is the eighth art. Made me realize how precious is the thing they do, how priceless is the thing we watch.

No one can say after watching the Buck-Celtic playoff that sport is an inconsequential thing. That play is simply recreation for the players, a diversion for the spectators. Huizinga, who said that the imperishable need of man is to live in beauty, went on to say, "There is no satisfying that need except to play."

And this was beauty and play at its best. The fascinating Kareem who is so good at what he does, you are put off by the

ease and simplicity with which he makes the most difficult look easy.

And Robertson, the complete basketball player, with his slow-motion fakes. Oscar lives in another time frame, where he can wait and wait and wait some more; and finally comes the release of that soft shot tracing a perfect parabola to the net. The Bucks were without Lucius Allen, but they had Dandridge with his quick hands, the menacing Warner, and Mickey Davis looking like some kind of mad king who had come off the throne to play with his jesters and by royal fiat had declared that all his wildly impossible shots would go in.

Against them, the Celtics had brought champions of equal strength and speed and skill. The tireless Havlicek, who was everywhere he was expected to be and everywhere he wasn't expected as well. And Nelson, the Knick Killer spelling Silas after his incredible leaps under the enemy basket. And forever joined in the battle was the bullyboy Cowens, who could be as soft as silk from the outside.

And making the team move through space in patterns as intricate as Balanchine's were imperturbable White and Chaney, before the impulsive Westphal inscribed his signature on the final outcome.

It was, as Santayana said of athletics, "a great and continuous endeavor, a representation of all the primitive virtues and the fundamental gifts of man." It was also a work of art. It certainly satisfied the first half of Santayana's definition of art: "manual knack and professional tradition." We are unlikely to see the manual knack and professional tradition displayed by the Bucks and the Celts surpassed by anyone but the greats in art and music and dance.

Santayana further defined art as having a contemplative side which he described as pure intuition of essence. I am not sure what he meant by that, although I suspect it has to do with knowing the inner meaning of what you are doing. I also suspect that the Bucks and the Celts were doing whatever Santayana was trying to describe.

It is usually true that philosophers try desperately to put into words what is familiar experience to the man in the street. "The poet," said Emerson, "is in the right attitude. He is believing. The philosopher, after some struggle, has only reasons for believing."

I am a believer. What I saw during those games was good and beautiful and therefore important. I may get an argument from those who are more likely to spend their afternoons on Madison Avenue than at Madison Square Garden, who see their art in the Met and not in the Mets, who find their joy in colors and shapes and nature, not in knack and tradition and essence.

Still, I can take heart from something Hilton Kramer said about Ansel Adams' exhibit. "For myself," wrote Kramer, "the look on the face of Georgia O'Keefe—in the 1937 photograph—is worth all the views of Yosemite Valley ever committed to film."

And I'll take the look on the face of Oscar Robertson, or any other Buck or Celt.

Mr. Kramer has told us what we always knew. That we really know a lot about art. Primarily because we know what we like and what brings us joy. Pure joy, said Santayana, when blind is called pleasure, when centered on some sensible object is called beauty, and when diffused over the thought of a benevolent future is called happiness.

It is possible that sport and play do all these things. That having found our sport, as the Bucks and the Celts have found theirs, we will feel its pleasure, know its beauty and live happily ever after.

But that is philosophers' talk. Let them try to explain what I already feel. I love them all. Every Buck, every Celt.