**The Purist/Partisan Spectator Discourse: Some Examination and Discrimination**

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*Abstract.* The spiralling discourse of sport spectatorship is a compelling development within recent sport philosophy. It is argued that the conceptual foundations of the purist and partisan carry problems. The purist carries the dubious baggage of traditional aesthetics and should be supplanted by the aesthetically neutral *cognoscente*. The partisan, especially as unpacked by Mumford, is a chimera. Partisanship contains a regard for the excellences of the practice within its own logic. It is argued also that Mumford’s picture of ‘frenetic’ partisanship and ‘tranquil’ purism is over-dichotomised and that partisan response to opposition excellence, and to the plays of one’s own side, is nuanced according to context. The essay also proposes the new concept of the deep partisan, who has a deep and heavily cognitivised love of his club and an intimately connected equivalent love of the excellences of the practice.

**Keywords**: purist, partisan, cognoscente, deep partisan

**Introduction**

Recent years have seen the growth of a formidable and fascinating body of literature on watching sport. Dixon’s (2007) pioneering essay on the ethics of supporting sports teams distinguished the purist and partisan and argued that the best type of fan is the moderate partisan, who combines the best elements of purism and partisanship and avoids the hazards of each. Limitations of Dixon’s treatment proposed by Mumford (2012), Russell (2012) and Feezell (2013) prompted Dixon (2016) to an excellent response that acknowledges the soundness of some objections brought against him and offers shrewd adjustments to the original treatment. Furthermore, Mumford’s (2012) seminal book has stimulated critical reflections by, for instance, Culbertson (2015, 2016). The discourse on watching sport is a captivating development of twenty-first century philosophy of sport.

My objectives in this essay are (i) to interrogate the logical geography of the discourse to date in ways I think have not been done already, (ii) to contour both partisan admiration of opposition play and partisan response to one’s own side and (iii) to introduce a new concept that I will call the ‘deep partisan’. The treatment defaults to team sports.

**The Purist and the Partisan**

Dixon (2007: 441) defines the partisan as ‘a loyal supporter of a team to which she may have a personal connection or which she may have grown to support by dint of mere familiarity’. Dixon (2016: 233) later characterises partisans as ‘those who zealously support their favourite team and long for its success.’ The purist, in contrast, ‘supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game, but his allegiance is flexible’. (Dixon 2007: 441) Dixon (2007: 449) advocates the ‘moderate partisan’, who ‘restrains the commendable loyalty of the partisan by the purist’s insistence that the game be played fairly, skilfully and with style’. Dixon’s normative touchstone shows that he does not endorse a dichotomised typology of purist and partisan. Mumford (2012: 18), similarly, states that

the purist and partisan tendencies can come in degrees and mixtures. A single individual may have both tendencies to some extent, with varying amounts from person to person. We can have a sliding scale of purism and partisanship. Or it may be that for some games someone is a partisan while for others they watch as a purist.

Mumford (2012: 76) reinforces his graded model in saying that ‘The total partisan and total purist are at the extreme ends of a scale’. He (Mumford 2012: 18) defends his isolation of the traits of purism and partisanship in the face of the above by saying that we need to know what it is that can appear to a degree in a person and that there are ‘interesting questions … about what such tendencies involve’.

Culbertson (2015) does an admirable job of problematising the purist/partisan distinction and some of the uses to which it has been put hitherto. Some of what I will go on to say is fairly cast as a continuation of Culbertson’s Wittgensteinian trajectory. I will first argue that the concept of the purist is hazardous. I then argue that Mumford’s conception of the partisan, even as a ‘tendency’ to be isolated, radically misleads about partisanship.

*The Purist: A Problematic Concept?*

Not the most compelling concept *per se*, the notion of the purist is, *prima facie*, a particularly dubious denizen of the sport world. Pre-definition, the word evokes the properties of traditional aesthetics, such as beauty, grace, elegance and the sublime, a desire for these qualities and an aversion towards less hygienic counterpoint qualities, such as sweat, aggression, struggle and bruises. The word should therefore ring alarm bells in the context of sport, because as Edgar (2013) has so powerfully argued, a Modernist aesthetic, which affirms the visibility of blood, sweat and tears, is essential to sport. This does not entail that the lens of traditional aesthetics has no place in sport. It means only that a singular desire for the properties of traditional aesthetics is misplaced.[[1]](#endnote-1)

It would be odd if Dixon’s and Mumford’s conceptions of the purist bore no continuity with the preceding hue of the word’s common usage. While Dixon offers characterisations that are not obviously convergent, three of them do bear such continuity with common usage. The first, again, casts the purist as one who supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game. The second, again, sees the purist insist that the game be played fairly, skilfully and with style. The third explicitly uses the notion of the aesthetic, since it describes the moderate partisan as someone who uses ‘aesthetic criteria’ in his choice of team (Dixon 2007:448, 449). Dixon (2016: 236) elaborates on this by saying that moderate partisans are disappointed when their team wins after playing ‘poorly, unattractively or unfairly’. I will return shortly to these conceptions of the purist and argue that they, alongside the word itself, needlessly introduce problems. What should be observed for now is that the purist’s disappointment with ‘unattractive’ victory, his insistence on style and his use of ‘aesthetic criteria’ in choice of team would seem to align him solidly with the project of traditional (and not Modernist) aesthetics. Mumford (2012: 10), similarly, states that ‘the purist’s perception of the game is an aesthetic one’; that the purist has a ‘purely aesthetic perception’ (2012: 12); that the purist has a ‘relatively tranquil pleasure’ (2012:12); that the purist would ‘rather see a beautiful game irrespective of the winner’ (2012:14); that the purist enjoys ‘an aesthetic rather than a competitive perception of the game and this gives them a gentler, less frenetic enjoyment’ (2012: 17); ‘that the purist appreciates the game for its aesthetic qualities and will find some in every game’ (2012: 17); and that for the purist, ‘the only thing corresponding to the defeat of the partisan would be a poor contest that offered little by way of aesthetic interest’. (2012: 134) Mumford (2012: 10) himself advocates a ‘more aesthetic mode of sports watching’. Again, not every characterisation of the purist (or of sport) provided by Mumford fits easily into a traditionally aesthetic framework, and I (again) return to this. What should be observed for now is the continuity with traditional aesthetics suggested by the immediately preceding characterisations of the purist.

Dixon’s characterisation of the purist as one who supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game does not map seamlessly onto his other characterisations. The former does not carry any obvious aesthetic import, but style and aesthetic criteria do, and it is likely, given the totality of Dixon’s treatment, that the notion of playing attractively does too. Moreover, it is not clear that the highest virtues of a team game entail playing with style (itself not a translucent notion) or playing attractively (unless playing with the highest virtues of the game is a priori playing attractively). And again, unless the highest virtues of the game are a priori aesthetic, then it is not clear exactly what the ‘aesthetic criteria’ of the purist are, nor (again) why they should be normative for team sports. Nearing the end of his essay, Dixon (2007: 448) identifies the ‘moral and aesthetic criteria’ of the moderate partisan as the rejection of violent play, cheating, verbal abuse of opponents and referees, and the rejection of playing ‘in a manner that violates the spirit of the game and interferes with the emergence of the game’s most skilful, exhilarating features by using professional fouls or other cynical tactics’. While there is no doubt a powerful case for the normativity of these desiderata, it is not clear that any of them should be considered aesthetic. It is possible that the language of the ‘purist’ seduces Dixon into thinking that (traditional) aesthetic value must inscribe every source of normativity in team sports, in turn tempting him into a promiscuous conception of aesthetic value. But, again, the lumpy freight of Dixon’s purist is unnecessary and unhelpful. Alongside the preceding, inherently dubious hue of the notion of the purist, only the immediately preceding desiderata, summarised in the foregoing commitment to the highest virtues of the game, are normatively convincing. Playing with style, for instance, is not.

Therefore, the purist should be dislodged by one who appreciates the *excellences of the practice*, where the latter might include qualities that cannot be readily subsumed by skill or that don’t map neatly (or at all) onto properties with the aesthetic charge of ‘style’ and ‘attractive’. Inscribed on this new touchstone is a neutrality about the aesthetic. That is, appreciation of the excellences of sporting practice might in instances involve aesthetic experience and in some might entail it,[[2]](#endnote-2) but it is unwarranted to assume an a priori connection. This putative spectator can be called the *cognoscente*. *Cognoscentes* come in degrees, naturally; sports echo art forms insofar as some know more than others about their excellences. For instance, some football fans are alert to tactical nuances that others will miss. However, almost all have a basic awareness of the skills of, for instance, teamwork, passing, dribbling, shooting, tackling and goalkeeping, and the equivalent goes for other sports (e.g. any tennis fan can recognise a good serve or passing shot). They also have a basic awareness of the significance of other performance-relevant qualities such as strength (physical and mental), determination and match-playing nous.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The hazards of Mumford’s preceding characterisation of the purist – whom he normatively elevates – should be apparent. The stress these characterisations place upon the (traditional) aesthetic-as-touchstone is very difficult to uphold. However, Mumford (2012: 21-23) also proposes an aesthetic pluralism for sport, summarised in his observation that ‘There is not one clear and simple aesthetic value to be found in sport and we should thus be cautious about oversimplifying the nature of the aesthetic experience sport gives us.’ He notes Kupfer’s (1983) typology of sports, and suggests of one type, *Competitive sports*, e.g. football, rugby, fencing (one competes directly against others) that ‘human opposition brings the opportunity for social drama’. He (Mumford 2012: 10) also notes how the purist may enjoy ‘how the game has key moments of drama’. These are important observations to which I return in the next paragraph and again later. Mumford (2012: 10), like Dixon, also characterises the purist in ways that don’t obviously have any aesthetic import, e.g. he ‘may enjoy working out the tactics of the two teams and seeing how the play develops’. However, Mumford’s purist is, like Dixon’s purist and (therefore) the latter’s moderate partisan, a conceptual and normative hornet’s nest that we are better without.

The receptiveness of Mumford’s purist to social drama and his enjoyment of key moments of such problematise Mumford’s preceding suggestion that the purist has a ‘gentler, less frenetic’ enjoyment than the partisan. Receptiveness to and enjoyment of *drama* are liable to – at the least – an emotional charge. Conversely, the spectating pleasures (and pains) of the partisan are not always feverish, as I try to elaborate later.

*Mumford’s Partisan: A Chimera?*

We have seen Dixon characterise the partisan as ‘a loyal supporter of a team to which she may have a personal connection or which she may have grown to support by dint of mere familiarity’ and as ‘those who zealously support their favourite team and long for its success’. I see no problem with this and return to it when I propose the displacement of Dixon’s moderate partisan by the ‘deep partisan’. I do, however, wish to raise fundamental difficulties with Mumford’s conception of the partisan. Contrasting the partisan with the purist, Mumford (2012: 17) states that ‘A concern with the mere result looks a crude measure of the worth of a game’. Mumford (2012: 12) claims also that for the partisan, all the game’s incidents are perceived through the ‘lens of competitive interest’.

Partisanship is supposed to signify a way of watching sport. However, the immediately preceding conception of the partisan makes it unclear why he should want to *watch* those contests in which he has a partisan interest. Given the singular concern with the result, why shouldn’t he do other things during the contest, discover the result at the first opportunity and then whoop in delight if it satisfies his partisan inclinations, sink in dismay if not and display so-so emotions if the result is indifferent (that usually means a draw)? Why watch at all? The answer is that Mumford’s partisan is a hopelessly thin, chimerical notion. A concern with the mere result certainly would be a crude perspective. But there is no such fan and it is *conceptually*, let alone psychologically and culturally difficult to imagine such a fan. If there were such, it would be very hard to consider them interested in the sport in question and impossible to see them interested in the *contests* in which they have a partisan interest. Whilst describing, perhaps, a logically possible perspective – though not the perspective of anyone who could be called a fan - it posits a travesty, which can’t be legitimated by Mumford’s preceding concession that most spectators watch contests with something of both the partisan and purist perspectives. Even the most primitive of partisans want to know and engage with far more precise facets of the relevant contests than the result. (It is not clear why Mumford attributes an indiscriminate concern with the *result* to his partisan. Why not posit a ‘total partisan’ who is content in some contexts, such as the one-off cup-tie, to know only whether it is win, lose or draw?) And a great many partisan fans want to watch a contest live in its entirety or watch highlights later. It is impossible to give a finite totality of reasons, but they would include the desire to see the contest unfold (‘the story of the match’) and a wish to see the specificities of one’s team’s performance, such as who scored, the nature of the goals, the resistance they had to overcome, who played especially well and, indeed, who is playing especially well in the current period (the partisan perspective is intrinsically longitudinal). These observations echo Roberts’ (1986) point that sport can be viewed in more particular as well as general ways. Three goals are identical at a certain level of generality insofar as they are all goals and count for the same. However, one is an intricate team move, another is a long-range screamer and another is a lucky deflection. The partisan is typically interested in those details and wants to see their occurrence. In *watching at all*, the partisan is interested in excellences of the practice, just as all of us are in a more primitive way when, as children, we have our first experiences of watching sport. Mumford (2012: 94) acknowledges that ‘we don’t particularly watch sport to find out the result … We watch sport to find out how the result was achieved’. But he doesn’t seem to see that this fact precludes the preceding ‘total partisan’ of his nightmares, i.e. he who is concerned with the ‘mere result’.

Similarly, the partisan fan tends to enjoy and lament memories of his team’s performances. These memories will be typically part of the collective memory of his team’s fans. They will, again, typically involve precise details of victories and defeats, e.g. coming from behind to win the Cup in the last minute or losing the Cup because of an own goal in the last minute.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Another difficulty with Mumford’s notion of the partisan is that a singular desire for victory leaves us struggling to make sense of other ordinary qualities of support. That is, the partisan would seem committed to wishing only weak opposition for his team. It would seem rational for him to prefer to avoid promotion, for instance, since this will result in stiffer opposition and almost certainly more frequent defeat. He would have no houseroom for the familiar objective of improvement through trickier opposition and other challenges (such as different atmospheric conditions), which make defeat more likely. To these observations it can be added that the very sense of *danger* is one of the most intoxicating attractions of partisan fandom. This is manifest in the anticipation of a tough contest and in the precise excitatory rhythms of the match experience, which might involve seeing one’s team go behind or having to withstand intense pressure. Mumford (2012: 12) gestures at this facet, but in calling it mere ‘dread’, he offers a shallow characterisation.

The argument to this point, if sound, suggests that engagement with a practice’s excellences is constitutive of the perspective of those partisan fans who exist in fact and not in some ontological outer space. Indeed, notwithstanding the conceptual rectification I suggest, Mumford (2012a: 373) seems to attribute impulses extraneous to partisanship when he states that ‘the partisan is far more likely to appreciate positive aesthetic values when they are produced by his own team’, and also in stating (2012b: 276) that the partisan ‘has chosen, at least indirectly, to take their aesthetic experiences almost entirely from one source’. It is not clear why Mumford’s partisan should be bothered about aesthetic values (or excellences of the practice) from any quarter. But again, Mumford’s partisan is, like bare consciousness, a fetish.

In the revised vocabulary I am suggesting, Mumford’s immediately preceding claims become (i) the partisan is far more likely to appreciate excellences of the practice when they are produced by his own team and (ii) the partisan chooses to enjoy excellences of the practice almost entirely from one source. However, the correct picture is significantly more nuanced than even these assertions allow. In the next section, I try to partially contour partisan appreciation of opposition play.[[5]](#endnote-5) And I also try to sketch some parallel contours of response to plays of one’s own team.

**Contextualising Partisanship**

The preference for a particular competitor to win a sport contest or competition, like a great many (arguably all) human preferences and other intentional states, cannot be decontextualized. It might in very rare cases be defeated, e.g. if one considers the tactics of one’s team ignominious or feels that defeat will hasten the departure of a poor management team or club hierarchy. However, if the preceding sketch is sound, the partisan’s preference qua partisan spreads itself across multiple particularities and betrays a concern for the excellences of the practice within its own logic. This realisation is sufficient to remove the supposed perplexity of how a partisan spectator can appreciate opposition quality. This supposed perplexity motivates Mumford (2012a) to his ‘oscillation’ theory, but Culbertson (2015: 196) is correct that ‘if we give up the desire to clearly isolate ways of seeing a football match as if they were quite distinct from each other, then the notion of oscillation starts to look fragile in the sense that the need for it disappears’. (Again, the literature tends to default to football, but Culbertson’s point transfers to watching any sport.) *Cognoscente* impulses implacably resistant to transfer from one’s own team to the opposition would be odd and perverse. I now try to provide and illustrate a set of contextual saliences through which partisan appreciation of opposition play is refracted. The set does not purport to be exhaustive and its members can exist in combinations. The set, again, refracts the partisan’s responses to the plays of his own team as well, as I also try to illustrate.

*Significance of Contest*

Some contests are more competitively important than others. Some are Cup Finals, some are significant league contests, some are friendlies, some are testimonials, some are meaningless, end-of-season league contests, some have the potential to break a club record for successive wins, etc. Opposition quality is more apt for appreciation in some of these contexts than in others. An opponent’s dazzling show of skill is more liable to be applauded in (say) a testimonial[[6]](#endnote-6) or a meaningless Spring league contest than if a winner in a Cup Final or if it kills the hope of breaking the club record for successive wins.[[7]](#endnote-7)

These observations reinforce the inadequacy of Mumford’s dichotomy of ‘frenetic’ partisanship and ‘tranquil’ purism. Further reinforcement is provided by the observation that response to one’s own team’s plays is similarly mediated by the significance of the contest. A goal and even a very good goal in a friendly might elicit hospitable smiles and warm applause, whilst a last-minute winner in the Cup Final incites open mouths, big eyes, frantic hugs, inarticulacy, etc.[[8]](#endnote-8)

*Prior Probability of Success*

The opposition sometimes makes victory unlikely, and in extreme cases means a gulf in class. Indeed, in the latter cases, partisan fans can attend or watch with a wish to see the opponents perform explicitly among their motivations. Whilst the latter attitude, again, is more likely when the contest doesn’t matter (e.g. a testimonial or friendly), it can also happen when the contest is significant. When the prior probability of victory is low, appreciation of the opposition can be felt and fulsomely displayed in both competitively significant and competitively meaningless contexts. An example of the former came in the UEFA Champions’ League in 1995, when Rangers supporters applauded an exceptional Juventus side who had just beaten their team 4-0 in Glasgow. Illustration of the latter came at Hampden Park, Glasgow, in 1979, when approximately 60,000 Scotland fans applauded World Champions Argentina (including the 18-year-old Diego Maradona), with Argentina leading Scotland 3-0.

Again, one’s partisan standpoint can manifest itself in a more tranquil fashion here than in others, particularly if inevitability of sound defeat to superior opposition is swiftly clear.[[9]](#endnote-9)

*Intra-Match Significance*

Some slices of opposition excellence impinge more than others on a contest’s outcome. A slice that occurs, say, with two minutes remaining in a contest where one’s team is leading 3-0 is more likely to incite one’s appreciation than one that is a last-minute winner or equaliser. The former might elicit applause and the latter heads-in-hands.

Again, the frenetic enjoyment of a last-minute winner for one’s own team contrasts markedly with the tranquil pleasure of the late and scuffled fourth goal of a 4-0 win or a late consolation goal when one’s team is three goals down.

*Opponents*

It might be easier to appreciate the excellence of some opponents than of others. It is well documented that football, for instance, involves identities that are partially dyadic,[[10]](#endnote-10) with the consequence that some fans can find it well-nigh impossible or significantly more difficult to appreciate the excellences of arch rivals.[[11]](#endnote-11) (This happens at club and international level.) Some fans are indisposed towards other opponents, instead of or in addition to arch rivals. There might be other, temporary reasons why some fans are particularly resistant to appreciation of opponent excellence, e.g. a disliked member of the opposition or comments made in the build-up by the opposition manager.

*Immediate and Retrospective*

The opportunity to view or just reflect upon action afterwards can result in appreciation that did not happen during the contest. The passage of time can intersect with preceding features, such as the knowledge of the significance of the action-slice for the contest or campaign. If one knows, for instance, that a piece of opposition brilliance did not finally deny one’s team the match or the league title, then it is more apt for appreciation.[[12]](#endnote-12) A new or heightened appreciation of opposition excellence can arise also through the more philosophical attitude that often accompanies the passage of time.

Again, the new meanings action can assume entail that partisan pleasure in plays of one’s own team can change its texture over time. For instance, the initially rapturous, seemingly pivotal goal might come to incite a solemn ambivalence with the knowledge that the match was followed by an improbably bad performance and result that denied one’s team the league title the goal had led one to expect.

*Other Objectives*

A contest might be conceived by fans as an opportunity for experimentation, some team bonding, etc. Therefore, the score might be less important than usual, and fans therefore more fitted to appreciation of opposition excellence.

This context, again, has natural consequences for the pleasures and pains resulting from plays of one’s own team.[[13]](#endnote-13)

*Individual Sport Culture*

The cultures of some sports encourage appreciation of opposition excellence more than those of others. Rugby union is more encouraging of such appreciation than is football, for instance.

Some cultures are less encouraging than others of zealous partisanship, in which case a more tranquil partisan experience is more likely. This can, like any cultural phenomenon, change over time, illustrated in the changing flavour of partisan expression at the Wimbledon fortnight over the last 50 years.

*Individual Temperament*

Some spectators are less disposed than others to appreciation of the opposition. This can be continuous with a grudging disposition throughout life, and it can be confined to the context of sport partisanship or one of its personal manifestations.

**The Deep Partisan**

Russell (2012: 23) flags up his anecdotal evidence of those who move away from partisanship as they become more intimately knowledgeable about the game in question. There is no reason to doubt this evidence, but every reason to counterpose it to another processual narrative and fan disposition. I and many others, I’m sure, have robust anecdotal evidence of avidly partisan fans in possession of the richest appreciation of the game’s skills, from whatever quarter in whatever contest.There is indeed a species of fan whose rich appreciation of the game and its excellences not only coexists with their deep love of their own team but is structurally undetachable from the latter. The avid partisanship of this fan is not merely a strong desire for their team’s success but is also a heavily cognitivised normative image of their club, involving empathic awareness of the club’s history, traditions, heritage, style, successes, disappointments, etc., and a robust expectation that it meet befitting standards of play and conduct. (Therefore, this fan is sometimes a critical friend.) But this normative image, again, is undetachable from an empathic respect for the game and *its* history, traditions, tactics, etc., and consequent appreciation of opposition excellences (and respect for anyone playing the game). This fan is therefore an avid partisan and a seasoned *cognoscente*. He has both the richest love of his team and an instinctively hospitable reception of opposition excellence (and all excellence in the sport). Indeed, he is grateful for the latter, both for itself and for the opportunity it offers his team to excel. He remembers and relishes close contests in which his team and the opposition play well[[14]](#endnote-14) and takes a precise pleasure and pride in seeing his team beat opponents who excel. This fan is the Deep Partisan, ‘deep’ because of (i) the cognitive and affective depth of his partisan affinity, (ii) the cognitive and affective depth of his engagement with the sport in question and (iii) the intimate relationship between (i) and (ii).

The ’deep partisan’ I propose therefore has key similarities with Dixon’s moderate partisan. In elaboration of the latter, Dixon (2007: 446) observes that ‘being a fervent, committed supporter of a team is perfectly compatible with showing respect for opponents and even admiring the excellence of their play’. Dixon is correct, and his observation is manifest also in the deep partisan. However, in the latter case, the love of one’s own team and the admiration of opposition excellence are not only compatible – they are structurally related. Moreover, to label the partisanship of this fan ‘moderate’ is critically misleading. This fan has the deepest and richest love of his team, a love that, again, is not moderated by a robust ability to appreciate opposition excellence.

There are probably penumbral cases where it is hard to say whether a fan is a deep partisan. It is not uncommon for a fan to have a primary affinity and one or two subsidiary ones.[[15]](#endnote-15) While it would be foolish to specify a limit on deeply partisan affinities, the nature of deep partisanship can’t avoid limiting the number of such affinities one can harbour simultaneously.

**Conclusion**

The purist and the partisan, as they have been articulated so far, are problematic notions. The whiff of traditional aesthetics that surrounds the former makes for uneasy habitation of the sport world. The purist should be dislodged by the *cognoscente*, who is defined by his affinity with the excellences of the practice. Mumford’s (‘total’) partisan, concerned with the ‘mere result’ of a contest, is a chimera, since there is no such spectator and cannot be such that we would call a fan of the sport. Any partisan fan has qua fan an engagement with the excellences of the practice. Dixon’s notion of the partisan spectator seems more anchored than Mumford’s, but his normative touchstone of the moderate partisan wrongly implies that normative expectations of one’s own team and the ability to appreciate opposition excellence moderate one’s partisanship. The deep partisan, on the contrary, has the deepest and richest love of his team and a deep attachment to the excellences of the practice, with the two intimately connected.

Mumford substantially underrates the capacity of partisan fans to appreciate opposition excellence and offers an over-dichotomised model of ‘frenetic’ partisan engagement and ‘tranquil’ purist engagement. Contextual sensitivity reveals a significantly more nuanced picture, involving robust partisan appreciation of opposition excellence and comparatively tranquil partisan pleasures.

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1. One eminent Scottish sport journalist, writing in the early 1990s, lamented the improbability of ‘a sporting heaven shorn of its blood and bruises’. However, sport without blood and bruises makes no sense even as an ideal. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The ‘aesthetic’ sports are a naturally plausible site of such entailment. Best (1978: 103-5) distinguishes ‘aesthetic’ and ‘purposive’ sports. The definition of the former is that there is no end specifiable independently of the means, with the latter defined by the presence of an independently specifiable end. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For discussion of skill and other performance-relevant qualities, see Davis (2007), Kretchmar and Elcombe (2007) and Breivik (2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Poignant illustration is offered by the now-defunct Brighton and Hove Albion fanzine, And Smith Must Score, which harps back in its title to an excellent chance striker Gordon Smith had to score a late and probably decisive goal in the 1983 FA Cup final against Manchester United (who won the replay 4-0). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. I would like to thank Emily Ryall in connection with this section, since it is touched off by her informal observations after a conference paper at the British Philosophy of Sport Association Annual Meeting (2013) in Gloucester. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. At the Jock Stein Testimonial between Celtic and Liverpool in Glasgow in 1978, with Liverpool leading 3-2 in the latter stages, some Liverpool fans close to me were audibly urging Celtic to an equaliser. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Of Paul Gascoigne’s momentous free kick for Tottenham Hotspur in the 1991 FA Cup semi-final, Arsenal fan Nick Hornby (1992: 134) rues, ‘it was simply astonishing, one of the most remarkable goals I have ever seen … but I wish with all my heart that I had not seen it, and that he had not scored it’. It is likely that all Arsenal fans feel likewise and that some would feel differently had the match been much less significant. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Memorable illustration is provided by Nick Hornby’s (1992: 115) reaction (‘AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH’) to Arsenal’s winning goal in the dying seconds of the 1979 FA Cup Final, after they had surrendered a two-goal lead with five minutes left. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Hornby’s (1992: 150) experience in season 1983-84 of his secondary affinity, Cambridge United, is instructive: ‘After a while, when winning a game appeared to be an option that had somehow become impossible, we began to adjust to a different order, and look for things that would replace the satisfaction of winning: goals, draws, a brave performance in the face of overwhelmingly hostile fortune … these all became causes for quiet, if occasionally self-mocking celebration’. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See, for instance, Armstrong and Giulianotti (eds.) (1999, 2001) and Kuper (1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Tottenham Hotspur’s status as Arsenal’s North London rivals (see Endnote vii) would have heightened the obstacles to appreciation of Gascoigne’s free kick for most, if not all, Arsenal fans. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Returning by train to Edinburgh after attending the 1986-87 Scottish League Cup Final between Rangers and Celtic, which Rangers won 2-1, I overheard a group of Rangers fans enthuse about Celtic’s equalising goal. This would have been unlikely had Celtic won and was very unlikely to be the case when the goal was scored. Conversely, Nick Hornby (see Endnotes vii and xi) and his co-Arsenal fans would have been more likely to retrospectively appreciate Gascoigne’s free kick had Arsenal won the match, and more so had they gone on to win the FA Cup. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Football’s phenomenon (for instance) of reserve teams, third teams, youth teams, the ‘boys’ club’, etc. provides another site of nuanced partisanship. The same might apply to the women’s teams which are often in the present day a part of major football clubs. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. A few hours after attending a memorable 4-4 draw (league match) between Rangers and Celtic in March 1986 (in which Celtic were twice two goals ahead and played more than half of the match with ten men), I pondered with the Celtic fan who joined me whether the match was, all things considered, a better experience than if Celtic had won. We thought it might be (especially if the contrast were an unremarkable win), and when Celtic went on to win the league, we were categorically glad the match had taken the course it did and ended level. That is sufficient to demonstrate that a partisan fan can, in context, prefer to draw than win a match, and furthermore, that the match might be against their arch rivals. I have anecdotal evidence that other fans on both sides felt likewise. Other partisan sport fans are likely to have equivalents. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See Endnote ix [↑](#endnote-ref-15)