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At Odds? Sports, Gambling and Hyper-Commodification

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ABSTRACT

Critical commentaries on the burgeoning industry of sports betting have focused on either its potential (i) to promote problem gambling or (ii) to encourage betting-related corruption. In this paper we explore a third and distinct line of inquiry according to which sports betting is of considerable moral concern insofar as it undermines the ideals of sport by transforming the manner and modes in which spectators *engage with* and *value* sports. Technological, cultural and legal changes have led to greater integration between many sporting leagues and gambling practices. Elite sport has long been commodified; however, we argue that such integration should be understood as a form of ‘*hypercommodification*’. By analysing sports betting as a form of hyper-commodification, we argue that it may promote objectionable instrumental modes of regard towards sport among individual spectators and fans. We also argue that increasing integration between sports and gambling practices may undermine the social conditions required to express appropriate modes of valuation towards sport.

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Introduction

Sports betting is a booming business. While gambling and elite sports have long been closely related—with examples dating back to the Roman Empire (Evans and Mcnamee 2021)—changes in technology and legal status have led to a rapid intensification of the relationship between the two practices. After a 2018 decision by the US Supreme Court, which struck down a federal law that effectively banned commercial sports betting, the majority of states have legalised the practice (Preciado 2023). In the first ten months of 2022, over \$73 billion was legally bet on sports in the US, an increase of 70 per cent from the previous year (Grossman 2023). In Australia—the country that gambles most per capita (The Economist 2017)—sports betting is the fastest growing online gambling market (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2022). In 2021–22 the turnover of sports betting companies licensed in Australia¹ exceeded \$50 billion, a tenfold increase from a decade prior (Snape 2023).

Looking beyond merely financial questions, the constant stream of advertising for betting companies during sporting contests is a familiar sight for fans; they are ubiquitous in many sporting leagues—on TV commercials, at stadiums and on uniforms. In the 2022–

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23 English Premier League, for example, gambling companies sponsor eight-out-of-twenty team's jerseys, more than any other industry (Rackham 2023). Advertising is just one example of a greater integration between sports and gambling. On some TV broadcasts, commentators segue to bookies to provide real-time updates on the odds of a game, while sport coverage increasingly analyses sporting contests with reference to the odds. In ever more sophisticated online betting platforms, punters can bet on an astonishing array of 'micro-events', such as the outcome of the next ball in cricket or the next point in tennis. Members of betting platforms can also watch sporting contests, make bets and interact with their friends all without leaving their preferred app (Gurrieri 2023). In many ways, betting and sports are becoming increasingly indissociable.

Many people find the close connection between betting companies and sporting institutions, leagues and teams objectionable. The primary reasons cited—in the limited literature on this topic—relate to (1) problem gambling and predatory marketing or (2) sport integrity and the potential for betting-related corruption. In this paper, we advance a separate line of enquiry according to which sports betting is a form of 'hyper-commodification' of sport that is objectionable because it undermines the ideals of sports, principally by changing the manner in which spectators engage with and value sports.

1. Traditional Critiques of Sports Betting

Existing critiques of sports betting—within and outside the philosophical literature—typically advance two main objections.² These relate to problem gambling and sport integrity respectively. We argue that these do not exhaust intuitive objections that critics have to sports betting.

1a. Problem Gamblers and Predatory Marketing

One concern with sports betting is, at heart, a more general concern with the addictive nature of gambling. People who gamble (on sports and other activities) can develop problematic gambling habits that can have detrimental impacts on individuals, families and communities. On this account, sporting leagues and clubs should not be bedfellows with betting companies because gambling is personally and socially destructive. This argument underpins Jones's et al. (2019) critique of gambling sponsorship and advertising in British football. They argue that the relationship between the marketing of gambling and the sport is morally problematic because it 'contributes to an increase in the overall "amount" of gambling in society [which] in turn ... contributes to an increase in the prevalence of problem gambling (including gambling disorder) and all the associated harms' (165). They also argue that, because a significant proportion of profits come from problem gamblers, that 'football ... benefits from, and contributes to, the addictive consumption of gamblers' (165).³ Both critiques draw an analogy with sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies, directing our attention to concerns around sporting contests being used to promote harmful behaviours.

A related though distinct critique is that gambling companies use predatory marketing techniques,⁴ either by signing up new users to sports betting platforms or encouraging existing punters to bet more. For instance, Gurrieri (2023) draws attention to 'increasingly pervasive and sophisticated marketing efforts that ... promote more

and more opportunities for gambling' such as push marketing efforts, personalised and targeted ads, incentives such as free bets, novelty markets, and app design features that promote continuous engagement. This line of critique often invokes concerns around advertising at children and young people. For instance, Bomberger (2020) raises concerns that an 'explosion in sports betting' could lead to 'a relatively young demographic ... developing personal issues with sports gambling'. While this critique draws attention to risks of people becoming problem gamblers, concerns that sports betting is underpinned by exploitative marketing techniques also raise distinct ethical concerns around consent.

1b. Sports Integrity and Perverse Incentives

A more specific critique of sports betting relates to its potential to undermine the integrity of sports by creating perverse incentives for match-fixing or spot-fixing among athletes, administrators and teams.⁵ McNamee (2013, 174) notes that 'the greater the variety of betting practices, the greater the possibility for corruption'. This was evidenced in the Pakistan cricket spot-fixing scandal, where three members of Pakistan's national cricket team were convicted of taking bribes from a bookmaker to deliberately bowl no-balls at certain moments during a 2010 Test Match against England (Scott 2011).

In a review of the relationship between gambling and sport, Forrest and Simmons (2003, 607) cite examples of betting-related corruption to argue that betting 'inflicts negative external costs on the sport industry because loss of confidence in the integrity of competition will lessen the attractiveness of the spectacle and, consequently, lower attendance demand and the value of media rights'. Aside from the financial costs, it seems likely that fans would not want to win a sporting competition on false pretences. Can a team truly claim to have won a competition when the other side threw the game? While studies have also cast doubt on the prevalence of betting-related sport corruption (such as Van Der Hoven et al. 2020, Boghesi 2008), the risk that betting compromises the integrity of sports (or even perceptions of integrity) underscore the importance of appropriate regulation to reduce the potential for corruption and strict bans on players, officials and administrators from placing bets.⁶

1c. Is That All There Is to Worry About?

These represent powerful objections, but do they exhaust the ethical concerns one might have about the relationship between sports and gambling? In this section we will suggest that there are deeper concerns with sports betting beyond problem gambling, predatory marketing and betting-related corruption. At the heart of these concerns are questions about the meaning, values and ideals of sport, and the extent to which these are at odds with treating sport as an opportunity to gamble. To see that this is a live concern in public debates, consider the following recent critiques of sports gambling from popular media:

- Australian politician Zoe Daniel recently raised concerns about the Australian Football League's (AFL) relationship with gambling advertising by saying: 'Do we really want to reach a situation where impressionable teenagers know more about the intricacies of "multis" than they do about on field tactics? ... Do we really want

a situation where they come to believe that having a punt is an integral part of following footy?’ (Niall & Sakkal 2023).

- In a recent op-ed for The Globe And Mail titled ‘Gambling is strangling the beauty of sports’, former Canadian Olympian Bruce Kidd expresses concerns that ‘television advertising is inculcating young Canadians into sports betting, rather than nurturing an appreciation of sports through the beauty of skilled athletes playing at their best, the drama of a closely fought game and the communal joy of being amidst fellow fans’ (Kidd 2023).

Each of these examples raises the concerns, previously identified, about problem gambling and exploitative marketing techniques. This is apparent through the appeal in each quote to young people (who are presumably most impressionable and likely to be exploited by gambling advertisements). However, each also appeals to sport as an independently valuable activity that may be corrupted when it is increasingly viewed as an opportunity to gamble. Kidd invokes the ‘beauty of sports’—referring both to the pursuit of athletic excellence and community pride for which sport clubs can be a locus. Daniel worries that the intricacies of gambling terminology and betting markets will replace interest in, and knowledge of, on field tactics. (She presumably takes the latter to be a valuable means of appreciating sport).

Each of these comments gestures towards two theses that may provide a further avenue to critique sports betting: (1) the claim that sport has some meaning or values that are violated when there is an over-emphasis on gambling; and (2) the claim that the ‘proper’ appreciation of sports is, in some sense, incompatible with treating sporting contests as gambling opportunities. In the remainder of this paper, we try to make sense of these intuitions, drawing on the philosophical literature on commodification to advance two further related objections to sports betting.

2. Sports Betting and Hyper-Commodification

Commodification refers to the transformation of a good or service into a commodity; that is, into a thing which is bought and sold. It is a central concept in debates about the ethical limits of markets, as many philosophers regard the commodification of certain goods as morally objectionable. This can be for a variety of reasons. Chief among them are concerns about distributive justice, exploitation and consent, and the perceived incompatibility between a good’s intrinsic value and its market price.

Sports are, of course, commodified in many ways and have been for a long time. Professional athletes are paid to compete and are regularly traded between clubs (often for explicitly financial reasons). Broadcasting rights for sporting leagues are sold to the highest bidders. Advertising is pervasive at sporting events. Nevertheless, as sporting leagues have become more professionalised and profitable, the degree to which sports are infused with the norms and logic of markets and commerce has increased significantly.

Walsh and Giullianotti (2007, 14) refer to this as the hyper-commodification of sport, which they define as ‘the substantive increase in the range and number of goods that are bought and sold as well as the intensification of market understandings and attitudes towards sport itself’. Their central argument is that hyper-commodification can

undermine sport or be inconsistent with treating sport as an activity that is valuable for its own sake. In their terminology, there are autotelic goods⁷ associated with sport—such as the mutual pursuit of excellence and pride in one's club and community—which are compromised or threatened by excessively market-oriented understandings of sport.⁸

To flesh out this claim, they identify four 'pathologies' associated with hyper-commodification which they argue are morally pernicious. Most importantly, for our purposes, is The Instrumentalist Pathology. This claims that 'the commodification of sport is pathological when it leads others to regard athletes and sport itself as mere means and not as ends-in-themselves' (Walsh & Giullianotti 2007, 120). This is based on the idea that commodification has a strong tendency to corrode our attitudes towards commodified goods, such that we often come to regard commodities as mere means. This is wrong, they argue, because certain goods have intrinsic value that cannot be captured in their market price. They identify two circumstances where this pathology occurs. First, athletes in competitive sports may be regarded as mere means—by spectators, opponents, coaches and even athletes themselves—through different forms of depersonalisation.⁹ Second, sport itself can be regarded as a mere means when the pursuit of profits dominates decisions of sports officials and administrators. This gives rise to two concerning phenomena. In the first instance, participants, fans and administrators may develop inappropriate attitudes towards sport—conceiving of it as a means to make profit rather than an end-in-itself. This may in turn lead to commercially-motivated changes to the rules of sports that diminish the skills required to play the game. Changes to the design and structure of gameplay are harmful where they undermine the ends of sport; they make it more entertaining but less nuanced.

Sports betting can be understood as another symptom of hyper-commodification of sport. Using the definition provided above, sports betting represents an 'increase in the range and number of goods that are bought and sold' as gameplay itself becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold on betting markets. Sports betting also plausibly involves an 'intensification of market understandings and attitudes towards sport' because it gives people a financial stake in the results of a game or on specific events transpiring within the game. In this way, sports betting may also prove to be an instance of The Instrumentalist Pathology, albeit one focused on fans and spectators of sport rather than its participants, officials and administrators.¹⁰

A further reason that hyper-commodification is a useful conceptual framework for viewing sports betting is that it is attentive to the degree to which a good is commodified. Walsh & Giullianotti are not concerned with the commodification of sports per se, but with a narrower (and historically recent) phenomenon—the intensification of market understandings of sport and the expanding influence of money and profit motives on elite sporting competitions. Equally, to pre-empt an obvious objection to this paper, one can acknowledge that gambling and sports have a long history, while still raising ethical concerns about modern sports betting practices and cultures. Even if gambling and sports have a long, shared history, recent trends in sports betting—such as a shift to online gambling on smartphones and growth in the number and types of bets that can be placed—plausibly raise ethical concerns. In short, one can accept Evans and McNamee's (2021, 208) claim that 'it is likely that elite sports and betting practices have been bedfellows, as long as sports practices have existed', while still objecting to the degree to which sports and gambling practices have become intertwined and symbiotic.

Importantly, however, this requires a careful ‘sport-by-sport’ assessment of the effects of commodification through gambling. In some sports—horseracing for example—betting has always been a central part of fandom.¹¹ Growth in gambling on horseracing might raise important ethical issues, but it is hardly corruption of the sport’s traditional meaning. And it is the meaning of sports, grounded in how they have traditionally been played and viewed, that is important.

Having shown that sports betting can be analysed in terms of hyper-commodification, the following two sections draw on philosophical debates about the moral limits of markets to explain why such a form of gambling might be a morally objectionable form of commodification.

3. Cultivating Instrumental Modes of Regard

One potential concern about sports betting is that it promotes instrumental modes of regard toward sport. Specifically, rather than being treated as an end-in-itself, sport may become increasingly viewed by punters as a means to make money. On this view, betting is psychologically corrosive to interest in sport. This raises three questions: How might betting affect the experience of spectators? Why might this be the case? And why might it be objectionable? In what follows, we answer each question and consider two objections.

3a. How Betting Might Change the Viewing Experience

A common argumentative thread in commodification debates concerns the attitudes that valuing agents have towards commodified goods. For instance, Anderson (1993, 144) characterises commodities as economic goods that are defined by a mode of valuation—‘use’—which is ‘a lower, impersonal and exclusive mode of valuation . . . to merely use something is to subordinate it to one’s own ends, without regard for its intrinsic value’. Radin also identifies conceptual indicia of commodification—objectification, fungibility, commensurability and money equivalence—which can each be interpreted as attitudes that people have towards commodified goods (Radin 1996, 118).

How might this apply to sports betting? Gambling on sporting contests could change spectators’ attitudes and experiences in several ways.¹² First, it might lead to *distraction*. For example, instead of focussing on the game itself, one might feel compelled to check the odds during gameplay to identify favourable betting opportunities. Second, it might lead to *selective attention*. A spectator may orient their attention towards aspects of the game on which they have a bet. Depending on the nature of the bet in question, this might well be tangential to the central drama of the game. For instance, to take an Australian example, if one has money on Charlie Curnow to kick five-or-more goals against the Adelaide Crows, one’s focus might be monopolised by where Curnow is on the field and how he can secure possession of the ball. Forward pressure and slick handpasses through the corridor might only be appreciated insofar as Curnow is on the receiving end of the kick into Carlton’s forward 50. Third, it might lead to *developing immoral preferences*. If one ‘takes the under’ on Curnow to score 5 goals, one might celebrate him being injured in the third quarter.¹³ Fourth, it can lead to *preoccupation with outcomes over performance*. Having a financial interest in specific results could lead to more concern with the odds and one’s bet and less concern about the skills of players or

the tactics adopted. Finally, and more generally, a preoccupation with gambling may also *reduce bettors' interest in sport*. For instance, sporting contests may cease to be of interest to a viewer unless they have money on the line. Or they might come to regard sporting contests as fungible. Rather than being concerned with the unique features of each match-up, they could well view each as equivalent (and substitutable) opportunities to profit.¹⁴

Importantly, the claims above simply gesture towards potential effects of sports betting. They are conceptual possibilities rather than empirical realities.¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that there is a considerable literature on the effect of monetary incentives on motivational structure; this is commonly referred to as motivation crowding theory. The crowding out effect—in which external intervention via monetary incentives or punishments can undermine intrinsic motivation—has been observed in a wide range of contexts. Meta-studies of this effect in social psychology have found 'clear and consistent' effects of extrinsic reward on intrinsic motivation. In particular, 'tangible rewards have a significant negative effect on intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks ... As a consequence of [financial] rewards, people take less responsibility for motivating themselves' (cited in Frey & Jegen 2002, 597–598).

While there has been limited study on the relationship between sports betting and attitudes towards sport,¹⁶ one American study provides limited evidence that gambling might reduce fan engagement. Across two experiments involving 492 participants, Blank, Loveland, and Houghton (2021, 366) found that 'consumers who bet on the home team and lose report lower positive emotions and subsequent fan engagement than consumers who do not bet'. The study concluded that 'we find support for a negative (but not positive) effect of sports betting on fan engagement'. While this study is narrow in scope, it suggests that the claim that sports betting might, in certain circumstances, reduce fan engagement and crowd out intrinsic motivations is at the very least plausible.

At this point, a caveat is in order. We do not mean to suggest that sports betting is the only practice that cultivates the objectionable modes of regard highlighted above. Other betting-adjacent practices—such as participating in a tipping competition or a fantasy league—might also promote these attitudes. Indeed, even someone who simply loves statistics might watch sports with selective attention and an undue concern for outcomes over performance! However, we think these practices are of less concern than sports betting. One reason is scale—presumably many more people gamble on sports than have a passion for statistics. Another is that a financial interest in sporting contests is, at least plausibly, more likely to be psychologically corrosive of interest in sport than being part of a tipping competition or a fantasy league, especially for bets where there is a short timeframe between placing a bet and the outcome occurring. Nevertheless, that said, we acknowledge that our argument here against sports betting could potentially apply to other activities.

3b. Objection 1: Not True!

One potential objection to our line of reasoning can be found in the work of Cosh (2023) who claims that 'it's closer to the truth to say that gambling is an inherent part of the pleasure of sport than it is to say it's inimical to those pleasures'. This objection could be teased out in two ways. The first (more modest) claim is that one can value sport as an

end-in-itself while gambling on sporting contests; these are not mutually exclusive ways of appreciating sport. The second (stronger) claim is that sports betting might actually enhance the spectator experience and thereby promote the values and ideals of sport.¹⁷ This is consistent with Killick and Griffiths' (2021) study on in-play sports betting which found that participants report to engage in live in-play betting to increase excitement, make the game more intense and use their betting skill and knowledge. On this view, sports betting not only doesn't corrupt sport, it enhances it.

Our response to this objection has three parts. The first point is clarificatory. We are not making the claim that treating some good or practice as a way to make money necessarily precludes valuing a good for its own sake. After all, many goods that are routinely bought and sold—pets, artwork and Catholic devotionals to name a few—are still regarded as things with intrinsic value by the people buying and selling them. As Brennan and Jaworski (2016) persuasively argue, this strong claim conflates regarding something as a commodity with regarding it as a *mere* commodity. However, we intend to make a more moderate claim—based on probabilistic and causal reasoning—that commodifying a good tends to promote an instrumental mode of regard towards that good over time. This argument only requires us to show that sports betting is psychologically corrosive to bettors' interest in—and engagement with—sport, not that it necessarily changes attitudes towards sport.

Second, it is useful to distinguish between different forms of sports betting. It seems at least intuitively plausible that head-to-head bets—or bets on the winner of a fixture between two opponents—are consistent with enjoying sport for its own sake, as the central drama of a sporting contest that the participants are concerned with (namely who will win the contest) is the very thing that is bet on. Likewise, futures betting—which are bets on which team or contestant will win a championship—may encourage the bettor to take a more active interest in the performance of a competitor across a whole tournament or league. However, micro and exotic bets are a different story. Micro bets are a category of 'in-play' gambling that tends to involve particular events that are repetitive and high frequency and where the time between placing a bet and knowing the outcome is typically short. Exotic bets typically refer to bets that are not related to the final result of a match, such as the first scorer or top scorer (Podesta & Thomas 2017). In these types of cases—especially where different betting markets are combined in a 'multi' – it is (at least intuitively) more likely that the concern of the bettor is focussed on specific events transpiring in a game, rather than the performance of that game overall.

Finally, it is helpful at this point to consider an analogy. Imagine that you are going to see one of your favourite musical groups—Australian indie rock band Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever. Imagine that a company called Gigsbet has recently launched and is offering betting markets related to the show. So you head to the bar, buy yourself a drink and—just to have some 'skin in the game' – place a multi bet: \$5 that the show will last at least 80 minutes; \$10 that the sound from the speakers will exceed 120 decibels; \$15 that the final song of the encore will be *French Press* and \$20 that lead guitarist Joe White's solo during the song will last 70–90 seconds. Across the show, you barrack for the band, egging them on to play the right songs at the right times. Imagine you win the multi and take home \$1500. Did you enjoy the gig more (or at least as much) by wagering on it? While answering in the affirmative is conceivable—given your particular psychological make-up—we think it is far more likely that you appreciated the

aesthetic merits of the band's performance a great deal less due to betting. You were likely distracted, attentive only to specific features of the gig and more concerned with particular songs being played at particular times than how well they were played. We think many people would agree.¹⁸ One might object that gigs and sports are not analogous because gambling has a long history with the latter only. But we think this says more about the normalisation of gambling in sports than it does about the tendency for betting to enhance our enjoyment of sports.

3c. Objection 2: Who Cares?

While the objection considered in the previous section raised doubts about the empirical claim that betting tends to promote instrumental regard towards sport, a further objection could accept the claim but reject the implication that it follows from this that sports betting is objectionable. After all, why does it matter if people regard sport as a way to make money and not as a valuable end-in-itself? Shouldn't people be free to regard sporting contests however they see fit, including as a way to make money, if that is their desire? Do the internal goods of a sport really depend on the attitudes of fans?¹⁹

Our response to this objection is in four parts. First, we would observe that—even if it does not matter for how sport is played by participants or run by administrators—it plausibly matters to the individual. If a fan cares about being a discerning viewer of sports, with appropriate admiration and respect for excellence displayed in sporting contests, then they might be justifiably concerned that their own interests and passions are undermined by excessively viewing sports as an opportunity to gamble. Just as art lovers might have an aesthetic interest in being able to appreciate great art, so too might sport fans have an aesthetic interest in appreciating great sport.

Secondly, there is plausibly a causal connection between the attitudes of fans and the internal goods of sport. For instance, consider what Simon, Torres and Hager (2019, 192) call the 'steamroller effect' which they raise as a general concern about the commercialisation of sport. This occurs where changes to the rules and design of gameplay—which are intended to make sports more entertaining—draw in new fans who 'lack knowledge and respect for its defining internal values, traditions, and ethos'. As this group come to constitute an increasing proportion of the total fans of a sport, it is more likely that that sport is 'changed more and more frequently to become ever more entertaining but at the price of important principles that make the game challenging and traditions that have been part of its history'.²⁰ This point could readily be applied to sports betting. As the prominence of gambling on sport grows, it will attract new fans without a historical connection to the sport who could come to value the sport for different reasons than traditional fans. This point highlights that the internal values of a sport—in particular how they are expressed and realised through the rules and structure of gameplay—are not entirely independent of the attitudes of its fans.

Thirdly, on some views the internal goods of sport are partly constituted by how fans engage with sport. For instance, Walsh and Giullianotti (2007, 10) argue that community identification is one of the 'fundamental moral values that emerge from or through sporting activity'. Walsh and Giullianotti (2001, 54) similarly claim, '*ceteris paribus* that the ideals and values embodied in the ethos of a community of sports practitioners are valuable'.²¹ Sporting institutions can be a locus for community and an expression of

community pride. For this value to be appropriately realised, presumably members of the community need to watch and talk about sport together. If an excessive emphasis on gambling alters the conditions within which sport is enjoyed by members of the community—a point that we argue for in the next section—then the effects of betting on fans' attitudes necessarily undermines certain internal goods of sport.²²

Finally, we would observe that some philosophers of sport argue that motivations for supporting sports teams can be subject to ethical analysis, and that some motivations are morally superior to others. For instance, Dixon (2001, 153) argues that there is an ideal sports fan—what he terms the 'moderate partisan' – who combines some partisan loyalty to one's own team with an appropriate degree of impartial concern (namely that a game be played skilfully, fairly and with style). He argues that moderate partisan support is—like any expression of concern for other people—a *prima facie* good. Dixon claims it is preferable to both the 'purely partisan fan' who is overzealous and the '100% purist fan' who lacks a commendable allegiance to their team. Whether this account of sports fandom is correct is beyond the scope of the paper. And we admit, in some cases, sports betting might actually temper the fierce loyalties of the pure partisan or promote some allegiance in the strictly purist, such that they better approximate the moderate partisan ideal. That is, of course, possible. But that is not our issue. Our point is simply that, if this account of sports fandom is plausible, then the motivations of fans can be subject to ethical valuation (independent of how fans' engagement affects internal goods of sport). It is not just the prerogative of the individual fan how they choose to support a team (as the objection supposed); morality is also at stake.

From this discussion we conclude that it is plausible that sports betting cultivates objectionable instrumental modes of regard towards sport and, if it does so, then it is cause for ethical concern.

4. Changing the Social Conditions of Sports Fandom

In the previous section we argued that sports betting can cultivate objectionable instrumental modes of regards towards sport and that, insofar as it does this, it is objectionable. In this section we outline a distinct (though related) objection that the growth of the sports betting industry is objectionable if it changes the social conditions within which sport is valued and makes unavailable preferable ways of valuing sport.

4a. Anderson on the Social Conditions for Realising Modes of Valuation

In *Value in Ethics and Economics* (1993), Elizabeth Anderson argues that different kinds of goods are rationally valued in different ways. A good is valued rationally if it is valued in a way that a person can reflectively endorse given her self-conceptions of what kind of person she ought to be and the concerns, character traits and qualities she ought to have (in Anderson's terminology, her 'ideals'). This account is underpinned, at least in part, by the nature of the good in question; she contends that goods 'differ in kind if they are properly valued in different ways' (Anderson 1993, 10). Anderson identifies a range of modes of valuation—such as use, respect, appreciation, honour, admiration, reverence, toleration and love—which, she argues, are proper ways of valuing different kinds of goods.

For Anderson, realising certain modes of valuation is an essentially social process. She argues, I am capable of valuing something in a particular way only in a social setting that upholds norms for that mode of valuation ... To care about something in a distinctive way, one must participate in a social practice of valuation governed by norms for its sensible expression (Anderson 1993, 12). She offers classical music as an example. She notes that, in contemporary American society, classical music is widely deemed to be 'a kind of sacred good' (Anderson 1993, 13), worthy of awe. This is expressed in the cultural norms associated with listening to classical music, including strict silence during performances and a clear spatial, temporal and functional separation between the audience and the music. She notes, however, that up until the late nineteenth century, classical music was celebrated as a popular form of entertainment, 'to be valued as audiences value athletic contests' (Anderson 1993, 13). Audience members could interrupt, criticise performances and even demand popular songs be included in operas. Her point is not necessarily that contemporary ways of valuing classical music are wrong or worse than the past, just that the social norms currently associated with classical music preclude valuing it in ways that previous generations did.

Anderson employs this framework to provide an account of the ethical limitations of markets, which is based on her views on the social conditions for both freedom and autonomy. For Anderson, freedom consists in having access to options to express diverse ways that people value things; 'because people value different goods in different ways, their freedom requires the availability of a variety of social spheres that embody these different modes of valuation' (141). In a similar vein, autonomy requires that a person 'confidently governs herself by principles and valuations she reflectively endorses' (142). While autonomy can be undermined at an individual level—for example through addictions and compulsions—it also 'requires social conditions for its realization' (142) because individuals' valuations depend on social settings in which they can be properly realised. In Anderson's view these conditions 'demand significant constraints on the scope of the market and private property rights' (142).²³

Anderson's framework can fruitfully be applied to sports betting. This is because watching sports is generally a social activity—whether on the TV or at a stadium—and also for the reason that deepening the ties between sports and gambling practices might very well change the social norms within which spectators watch and engage with sports.

4b. Applying Anderson's Theory to Sports Betting

How might the growth of the sports betting industry change the social norms around watching sport? In this section we identify two ways, relating to (1) expressing fandom and (2) sports coverage.

Expressing Fandom

The rapid rise in gambling on sporting contests risks leading to a social environment in which placing a bet is one of the primary ways to express one's love for a sport or a team, or where knowing the odds is a more important marker of fandom than understanding and appreciating the game. This risk is particularly acute because of the pervasiveness of gambling advertisements in sporting broadcasts which seek to promote gambling practices by appealing to people's love of sports. For example, in a study of online sports

betting advertising, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2018, 715) direct our attention to the ‘structural metaphors’ that are used by online sports betting companies—including (notably) gambling as ‘an act of love and loyalty’ and ‘betting as a sport’ (719). These facilitate the perception of sports bettors as ‘active players rather than passive observers’ and contribute to a ‘blurring [of] the lines between the real sport event and the bet’ (720). Lopez-Gonzalez et al also cite evidence of the sheer ubiquity of gambling advertisements in different sporting leagues²⁴ and conclude that ‘such penetration and extent of betting advertising is a likely contributory factor in strengthening the mental association between sports and gambling’ (710).

These risks are especially pertinent when teams or codes become involved in ownership and promotion of gambling products and services, for example through partnerships, uniform naming rights, stadium signage and promoting odds during televised broadcasts. McGee (2020) has termed this the ‘gambification’ of sport.²⁵ This business model is especially concerning because it gives leagues a direct financial interest in the continued growth of sports betting. This is likely to lead to increased integration between sports and gambling companies over time.

These considerations suggest that there is cause for concern for all fans of sport. But matters are even worse for existing bettors. As online betting platforms become more sophisticated, bettors can gamble, watch sports and engage with friends all within their preferred gambling app. For example, Sportsbet Live Streaming enables users to watch and bet on certain sports simultaneously, while its ‘Bet With Mates’ feature allows people to create a group, pool funds and bet as a group (Kruse 2021). So-called ‘social betting options’ are offered by many major betting platforms, and represent an integration of the social aspects of sports viewing with gambling practices. Through these kinds of features, existing bettors can increasingly have their entire experience as fans mediated through a betting platform and the norms of gambling. Of course, one could respond that bettors do not have to consume sports in this way. But aside from the addictive component of sports betting, the social costs of disengaging from this form of sports consumption may be too high, especially if a person’s whole friendship group stays connected and enjoys sport together through betting platforms.

Coverage of Sports

Another respect in which the social contexts for appreciating sports may be affected by gambling is through its effects on coverage. For instance, commentary is an important way that the drama of sporting contests is conveyed to spectators by providing a coherent narrative to understand the dynamics and flow of the game.²⁶ However, the tone and focus of commentary might change if it becomes oriented towards gambling. For example, Affleck (2023) cites an example of a college football game between the University of Utah and Penn State—where the latter had a commanding lead with less than a minute to go in the game—but where commentators focussed on how much a late touchdown would mean to people. He explains, the announcers didn’t elaborate, but the implication was obvious: Those who had bet the over – wagering that together the two teams would score more than 54 points – had a lot riding on that touchdown. So, in a sense, did ESPN. In a blowout, fans of both teams are likely to tune out. But when there’s money riding on something like the over, eyes stay glued to the screen. This is, admittedly, just one example. However, given the importance of commentary, if match coverage

appeals to the interests of bettors, this risks corrupting a primary mechanism through which spectators make sense of the game.

Australia offers a more extreme example of the integration of coverage with gambling promotions. A common practice in major sporting codes—one eventually banned in 2013 – was to show live odds during sport matches or events. For example, commentators would regularly cut to bookmakers—who often appeared to be part of broadcast teams—to provide live updates on the odds (ABC News 2013). One potential concern with this practice is an over emphasis on the odds as a tool to understand and interpret how a sporting contest is unfolding; this risks abstracting away from the things that make sports enjoyable and valuable. For instance, rather than looking to the feats of athletes participating a contest to identify a shift in momentum, one can instead have the well-known Australian bookmaker Tom Waterhouse provide an update on the real-time variation in the head-to-head betting market. Another concern is that these promotions were specifically designed to appear as part of the broadcast coverage, thereby making gambling practices an apparently inherent part of watching sport. Interestingly, while the policy was framed as a way of curbing problem gambling, the NRL chief executive framed his support for the ban in terms consistent with the argument of this paper: ‘the overwhelming sentiment is that we do not want to see betting as the primary focus of our game . . . we want young kids to be enjoying the skill of their favourite team, not quoting the odds’ (BBC News 2013).

The influence of gambling on sport is perhaps even more pronounced in pre- and post-match coverage. For instance, ESPN has had run a Daily Wager TV show since 2019 which is explicitly centred around gambling (Affleck 2023). In 2022, ESPN announced that it would be expanding its sport betting content with a range of new shows, content and analysis (Manzo 2022). The Bad Beats segment on SportsCenter—which has recently graduated from segment to its own monthly show—is explicitly focussed on post-match analysis on teams that have underperformed against their odds (Lucia 2022). These examples indicate that the entertainment value of the sports coverage is increasingly oriented towards gambling practices.²⁷

In each of these ways, sports coverage—which is an important way that people interpret and make sense of sports—may be oriented towards gambling practices in ways that fundamentally (and objectionably) change the spectator experience. In addition to the concerns highlighted above about betting becoming a core way that people express their fandom, this provides grounds for concern that growth in sports betting might change the social conditions within which people value sports. On the one hand, this could make certain values of sport harder to access for spectators; for instance, it might be more difficult to appreciate athletic excellence when sports coverage is focussed on betting opportunities. It might also undermine certain values of sport, such as the communal value of spectators sharing in the appreciation of sport. Does this preclude, to use Anderson’s language, the freedom of people to express diverse modes of valuation towards sport? We suggest this would be an overstatement. After all, plenty of fans do not bet on matches, and many people’s love of sport is based around competition, community and the beauty of the game (not money). Nevertheless, it provides grounds for concern. If sports and gambling practices become ever more deeply integrated and scarcely distinguishable from one another, the social context necessary for valuing sport intrinsically could be compromised or lost.

Conclusion

We have argued that traditional critiques of sports betting—that it leads to problem gambling and betting-related corruption—do not exhaust the ways in which it is objectionable. By characterising sports betting as a form of hyper-commodification, we have argued that it could well undermine the internal goods of sport by changing the experience and attitudes of spectators and fans: that is, it may lead some individuals to cultivate objectionable instrumental modes of regard towards sport. It might also change the social context in which sport is enjoyed and admired in ways that make it much harder to appreciate sport for its own sake. In these ways, the growth of the sports betting industry is an appropriate object of ethical concern for those motivated by love of the game. Even though betting can enhance the entertainment value of sport and cultivate intrinsic enjoyment, the odds, as it were, aren't in its favour. Can we preserve non-commodified understandings of sport as its institutions become more culturally, financially and technologically integrated with gambling companies and practices? Absent meaningful change from sporting institutions or governments, we wouldn't bet on it.

Notes

1. Technically this statistic refers to betting companies licensed in the Northern Territory (NT), one of Australia's eight states and territories. The NT is the preferred regulatory jurisdiction for sports betting in Australia.
2. It should be acknowledged from the outset that, while this paper focuses on critiques of sports betting, it may also have a range of benefits. For example, it may help to generate revenue for sports teams and leagues, boost the profile of sports competitions and attract new fans. In addition, like other forms of gambling that involve skill, it could be construed as a game-like activity that—much like the sports that it derives from—has its own internal goods (e.g. demonstrating excellence by outperforming the market). We do not deny that sports betting may be intrinsically and instrumentally valuable in certain respects, however our focus on this paper is on its negative consequences for sports.
3. Similarly, GALLANT and COWLISHAW (2022) argues, 'allowing sports betting agencies to become entrenched in our sporting culture and therefore our lives, is deeply concerning', citing a range of costs of gambling such as 'relationship issues, family violence, physical and mental health issues and criminal activity, as well as hampering a person's ability to work or study'.
4. Predatory marketing can be understood as a form of manipulation of vulnerable people into unfavourable marketing transactions by exploiting their vulnerabilities (BRENKET 1998).
5. In a discussion of sports integrity and gambling, Walsh and Giullianotti (2007) cite the example of South African test cricket captain Hanse Cronje who was implicated in sophisticated efforts to throw test matches for personal financial gain.
6. Importantly, while gambling may lead to corruption of sports, regulated betting markets might also have tendencies that pull in the opposite direction. Arguably bookmakers have an interest in ensuring a clear and fair set of rules in place to settle bets and encourage customers. For instance, McGugan (2015) argues, 'legal bookmakers subject to government regulation have a powerful reason to keep sports honest, because nothing scares away customers faster than the suspicion that a game is rigged'. Strange betting patterns might also serve to bring to light betting-related corruption (thereby deterring future incidences).
7. An autotelic good is one that has a purpose in, and not apart from, itself. It has been used in psychology in reference to people with certain motivational states, namely those that are internally driven.

8. They draw especially on internalist accounts of sport, in particular Robert Simon's *broad internalism* according to which sport is partly constituted by underlying intrinsic principles that provide a foundation for the interpretation and ethical justification of sports practices. On this view, the foundational principle is mutualism—sport is understood as a 'mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge' (Simon, Torres & Hager 2019, 47). Other broad internalist accounts emphasise different principles, such as respect for the integrity of the game or contractualism (DEVINE and FRANCISCO 2020). We will not wade into these debates. Nor will we seek to defend the view that sport is intrinsically valuable; we will argue *from* this premise not *for* this premise. However, we note that many philosophers of sport and sports fans alike would be sympathetic to the idea of sport as an intrinsically valuable activity.
9. Importantly, the issue is not with athletes being treated as means—after all, almost by definition, athletes are used by coaches as a means to win sporting contests in which they compete. Rather the issue is with athletes being treated as a mere means (that is, as a means only and not also as ends in themselves).
10. Arguing for this point requires an account of how the internal goods of sport are related to the attitudes of fans that watch the sport. We believe that there is a close relationship between the two—in particular that the internal goods of sport depend, in part, on how sport is watched by its fans. We examine this issue in detail in [Section 3c](#).
11. For instance, Evans and McNamee (2021, 208) claim that 'horse racing ... seems almost to have been developed in order to provide a platform for betting'.
12. We thank friend and erstwhile sports bettor Jordan Bradfield for providing his thoughts about how betting changes the spectator experience.
13. It is worth noting that prediction markets that give bettors a financial stake in bad outcomes occurring have been criticised in the philosophical literature on commodification. For instance, Sandel (2012, 146) criticises the Policy Analysis Market—a short-lived proposal for a futures exchange which would enable people to bet on certain events such as terrorist strikes and wars—arguing, 'if death bets are objectionable, it must be ... in the dehumanizing attitudes such wagers express'. This criticism seems to suggest that these bets are objectionable independent of the attitudes of bettors. This has been called, in the literature, a semiotic objection to commodification (BRENNAN and JAWORSKI 2016). Here we do not intend to suggest that sports betting is harmful because of what it expresses; we only seek to claim that it might affect people's attitudes and dispositions in harmful ways.
14. Importantly, the ways discussed in this paragraph about how gambling might affect spectator engagement are directed primarily towards fans of a sport that gamble on that sport. Many non-fans presumably gamble on sports without changing how they watch them (perhaps because they do not watch these sports at all or because they do not watch them attentively). These types of betting are not the focus of this section. [Section 4](#), however, has a broader focus as it considers the ethical issues that arise if gambling changes the social environment within which sport is valued.
15. The analysis provided in this section is intended to complement empirical analysis about the effects of sports betting on fan engagement. While we draw on some empirical work to show that it is at *least plausible* that sports betting cultivates instrumental modes of regard towards sport, the primary focus of the section is to argue for the ethical significance of the consequent if the antecedent is true; that is, *if* sports betting leads to an instrumental mode of regard towards sport, *then* this is cause for ethical concern.
16. More attention would be interesting especially because in certain cases monetary incentives can 'crowd in' intrinsic motivation.
17. For instance, Stewart (2014) argues in a New York Times op-ed: 'I would never get up at 10 a.m. on a Sunday to watch the Jags when my team, the Broncos, won't play until 1 p.m. With \$500 on a game, I am like a kid on Christmas morning. Sports betting is a challenge. It makes sports more exciting. It makes you a part of the contest'.
18. We note that some would disagree with the claim that there is an appropriate way of attending to art that might be undermined by pecuniary interests. For instance, DICKIE (1964, 61) criticises the view that there is an appropriate aesthetic attitude towards art-one

characterised by distance or disinterest—instead arguing that ‘*disinterested attention* is a confused notion’. On his view, there is simply attention to art or a lack of attention, which is conceptually independent of a person’s motives or intentions for engaging with art. We are inclined to disagree with his account and would emphasise different modes of attentiveness towards art or sport (which may be closely related to our motives). On the topic of sports betting, we would also defend the less contentious claim that gambling can reduce attention to sport (for instance, by leading to distraction), even if gambling does not reduce someone’s attentiveness to sport by removing their disinterest.

19. We thank two anonymous reviewers for pushing us to be clearer about the connection between internal goods of sport and the attitudes of fans.
20. As an example, they cite the reluctance of baseball authorities to enact strict rules around the use of performance enhancing drugs, as these drugs lead to more home runs (in a way that, they argue, cheapens the value of the home run). It is worth noting that, by contrast, some philosophers argue that performance enhancing drugs are, in fact, consistent with the spirit of sport (SAVULESCU et al. 2004).
21. They explicitly extend the idea of a practice community to include fans.
22. It should be noted that the claim that community is an internal good of sport is not uncontroversial. For instance, in a critique of Walsh and Giullianotti’s (2001) account of community as an internal good of sport, Jones (2003, 46–47) argues that fans ‘should not concern us with respect to their usurpation of the internal goods of sport because . . . their association with the practice is contingent [and] there is also no indication that they [the internal goods of sport] are contingent upon the presence of spectators’. We do not intend to provide a substantive critique of Jones’ view, but we would observe that fans often have an important role in motivating athletes to perform well during sporting contests. In addition, while we accept that ‘fans do not participate in the practice in the same way as the players’ (Jones 2003, 46), this does not mean that fans cannot be conceived of as part of a sport’s community of practice.
23. The claim that markets and market norms can crowd out—or make unavailable—other ways of valuing goods is a common thread in philosophical debates about commodification. For instance, Margaret Radin’s *domino theory* claims that non-market regimes for goods cannot co-exist with a market regime because ‘once some commodification enters the arena, there is a slippery slope—a domino effect—leading to market domination’ (Radin 1996, 95). A well-known and oft-cited example of this is Richard Titmuss’ (1970) famous study on the effects of remuneration on the supply and quality of blood in the US and the UK. He found that introducing remuneration (in the US context) led to reduction in quantity and quality of blood supplied, which he attributed (in part) to the fact that creating a market for blood people’s sense of obligation to donate blood and changes the meaning of blood from ‘the gift of life’ to a mere commodity.
24. For instance, they note that National Rugby League (NRL) fans in Australia watch, on average, over 15 minutes of gambling advertising per game. There is an average of 50.5 ‘episodes of marketing’ during an average AFL match.
25. SEAL et al. (2022, 1372) note that in Australia both the AFL and National Rugby League (NRL), ‘the relationship between sports and gambling is increasingly symbiotic’. For instance, beyond traditional revenue streams like team sponsorships and wagering partnerships, some codes collect ‘product fees’, which is effectively a share of the turnover of gambling companies (BELOT 2023).
26. One need only mute the TV during a tense period of gameplay or listen to an especially erudite commentator to appreciate the importance of good commentary.
27. This is also apparent in the Australian context. Sportsbet sponsors a podcast, *In The Back Pocket*, which provides betting advice for punters on the upcoming round of football. In the official AFL app, upcoming games display four core pieces of information: the teams competing, venue, time and the odds for upcoming games (also sponsored by Sportsbet). Kayo, a sports subscription service, has also recently partnered with Sportsbet to show live odds for selected sports during the game (Kayo n.d.).

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