Introduction

There are football philosophies and there is philosophy of football. The former is about the more or less reflective outlook on the game that people have or else about the style of play that a football team chooses to follow, whereas the latter – to philosophise about the practice of playing football – is what we will aim at here. When Bayern Munich’s Spanish manager Pep Guardiola told the press after his club had been given a 4–0 beating at Allianz Arena in Munich by Real Madrid in the 2014 Champions League that ‘following this defeat I am even more convinced of my philosophy’, he was talking about style of play, not a philosophical position akin to, say, existentialism or realism. So, football philosophies aside, what might a philosophy of football look like? The answer is simple: it will look like any other philosophy. The only difference between, say, the philosophy of football and, say, the philosophy of biology or the philosophy of film, is that in the former case we apply the tools from the philosophical toolbox to the phenomenon of football and not, as it happens, to biology or film (or any other social practice).¹

A philosophy of football is of course a subset of philosophy of sport and much of the discussion in this chapter builds on topics that have been discussed in philosophy of sport with a keen eye on how to relate these discussions to football. Furthermore, there are only some issues that we will be able to deal with in this short chapter. The field of philosophy of sport was one of the first of the scholarly and scientific disciplines connected with the study of sport to organise itself internationally, in 1974. It is a fairly large and still expanding field. The first issue we address is how to understand football as a sport. In order to do that we take our starting point in Bernard Suits’s classical definition of games and sport, and its application to football. That football coheres with Suits’s definition on what a sport is taken to mean does not prevent football from also being done as exercise. Playing a sport and exercising are not mutually exclusive activities.

However, we will not spend any time patrolling the conceptual borders between sport and work, sport and art, etc. (though for the latter, see Best, 1974, 1985; Borge, 2012; Edgar, 2014). We then turn to the question of what kind of sport football is and we argue that football – which can be conceived in myriad ways – can helpfully be thought of as a constructive–destructive sport. Competitors must not only try to excel in the game by constructing opportunities to score, but also actively try to prevent or hinder the opposition from doing the
same. Among the constructive–destructive sports football is special due to the dynamics of the
game where the hindering actions, the destructive side of the game, are easier to master, than
the scoring of goals, the constructive side of the game. In turn, this renders football a low-
scoring game, where the margins between scoring and a near miss, between winning and losing
are slim, and chance or luck plays a bigger role than in other similar sports. This again gives rise
to a denser and sometimes darker drama than in other sports.

**Suits’s analysis of sport applied to football**

Not all, but quite a lot of academic disciplines have certain authors and theories, which often
serve as standard springboards for discussing some topic or another in that discipline. In
philosophy of sport it is fair to say that the works of Bernard Suits serve as that obligatory
starting point when facing the question of what a game and subsequently what a sport is. His
*The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* stands out as a landmark in the enterprise of trying to
analyse games and sports, while also being written in an entertaining and engaging style. Suits
argued that for something to count as a game it must meet the following conditions:

1. That the activity has a prelusory goal – that is a goal that is specified prior to a contest.
2. That the activity has a set of means that limits the ways in which the prelusory goal could
   be legitimately achieved.
3. That the activity has rules that define the activity and specify permissible and impermissible
   means in the achievement of the prelusory goals.
4. That the game players adopt a certain attitude or disposition in their attempt to achieve the

Suits sums up this view by saying that ‘playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome
unnecessary obstacles’ (1978: 55). Whereas all sports are games for Suits, not all games are
sports. To make a game a sport Suits claims that the activity must also meet the following
requirements:

5. That the game be a game of skills.
6. That the skill be physical.
7. That the game have a wide following.
8. That the following achieve a wide level of stability (1973: 44–5; McNamee 2008: 15).

This definition of sport is by far the most widely discussed and criticised attempt to define sports
in the philosophy of sport. Instead of addressing such critiques directly we will touch upon
them as we look at how Suits’s requirements fit football.

What then to make of the first requirement? The task is more complicated than might be
thought. What does it mean to have a prelusory goal: that which is described as prior to the
contest? A lusory goal is the goal of the game or the game goal. In the case of football that lusory
goal may be stated in negative or positive terms. Positively, it is to win the match by scoring
more goals than the opposing team, or negative, not to lose by conceding more goals than the
opposing team. Prelusory goals must then be understood as aiming at some state of affairs before
game playing starts. The problem is how that goal is to be described – as a goal, which is there
to be achieved before we invented the game of football or else as a goal, which is there to be
achieved before every single competition, i.e. football match. The intuitive answer to the latter
question would be that the goal that a football team has before a football match is to score more
goals than the other team or, at least, not concede more goals than the other team. Now, however, the prelusory goal and the lusory goal of football are the same. Instead, the prelusory goal must be described in game-neutral terms, that is, without mentioning anything, which belongs within the game of football like the scoring of goals, the goal line, and so forth. What you will get is a fairly long, convoluted and somewhat odd description of the physical facts involved in bringing a football over the opposing team’s goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar and the prevention of the opposing team bringing a football over one’s own goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar. Clearly, it can be done, though one might settle for less by merely saying that the game takes place in physical space and that that space exists independently of the game playing.

Looking back at the expression that game playing being the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles one might be tempted to think that the obstacles exists prior to and independently of the game or sport in question. Yet, as Graham McFee has pointed out, in certain games like chess ‘the idea of “unnecessary obstacles” makes no sense’, since ‘[n]o “obstacles” here seem explicable independently of the game’ (McFee, 2004: 25). Similarly for football, the prelusory goal of making the football cross the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar more often than the opposing team manages to do is not possible apart from the pre-existing institution of football already being in place. In one sense, the unnecessary obstacle might be thought of as the opposition. But this makes no sense. For without them there is no contest. Thus they are logically necessary for a game of football. Without them, even with the pitch, the markings, the ball, the goalposts, and so on, we do not have the game of football. The emphasis should be on football being an unnecessary activity and not football attempting to overcome unnecessary obstacles. Or, put otherwise, one can keep that part about unnecessary obstacles, but it is trivial. If playing football is an unnecessary activity in the sense that this is not something you in the normal case need to do for survival, reproduction, etc., then any obstacle you encounter within that activity like brutal defenders, tricky wingers, slippery pitches, half-blind referees’ assistants, and so on, is of course also unnecessary. William Morgan suggested that sports and with it football follow a ‘gratuitous logic’ and that is in effect to emphasise sports as unnecessary activities, while omitting the part about unnecessary obstacles (Morgan, 1994: 211). Similarly, Mike McNamee holds that sports are ‘characterised by a gratuitous logic involving, centrally, physical skills’ (2008: 19).

The gratuitous logic of football entails a specification of the means allowed when playing football and the rules of the game. This is Suits’s requirements 2 and 3, and, as Suits acknowledges, this line depends on the notion of constitutive rules as contrasted with regulative rules (1978: 51–2). The distinction between constitutive and regulative rules is closely associated with John Searle, but Searle himself claims that the distinction was ‘foreshadowed by Kant’s distinction between regulative and constitutive principles’, while acknowledging Rawls’s ‘discussion of a related distinction’ (Searle, 1964: 55, 1969, 1995; Rawls, 1955; Midgley, 1959, also precedes Searle). Regulative rules regulate behaviour, activities and practices that exist independent and prior to such rules. Here are examples of regulative rules of football. In the FIFA Laws of the Game in the parts of ‘Law 4 – The Players’ Equipment’ one is told that players must wear shin guards as parts of their basic equipment and that ‘[t]he basic compulsory equipment must not have any political, religious or personal slogans, statements or images’. These are regulative rules. They regulate the already existing practice of playing football. Constitutive rules, on the other hand, do not regulate already existing pre-established behaviours, activities or practices, but instead make these possible. Football is defined and made possible by its constitutive rules, which is why such rules often take the form X count as Y in context C. The part of the FIFA Laws of the Game called ‘Goal Scored’ under the ‘Law 10 – The Method of Scoring’ is a constitutive rule:
A goal is scored when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar, provided that no infringement of the Laws of the Game has been committed previously by the team scoring the goal.

X (the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar) counts as Y (a goal) in context C (no infringement of the Laws of the Game has been committed previously by the team scoring the goal and we need to add to context C; within a game of football). If you want to score a goal in football you must fulfil or be seen as fulfilling this rule of the game. Other constitutive rules are negative – not stating when something counts as something in the game, but rather prescribing what is or is not part of the game. These are specified in the FIFA Laws of the Game under ‘Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct’. These constitutive rules limit the ways by which the aim of scoring a goal in football can be legitimately achieved. Constitutive rules like the ‘Goal Scored’ rule have a feel of definitions to them and that is only natural as it is the constitutive ‘Goal Scored’ rule that makes scoring in football possible. Without some such rule that stipulates what counts as scoring a goal in football, there would be no scoring of goals in football. With no constitutive rules of football, there would be no football. Games are as Scott Kretchmar points out ‘the product of their constitutive rules’ and the same holds for sports (2007: 2; see also Kretchmar, 2001).

Regarding requirement 4, Suits tells us that the needed lusory attitude is ‘the knowing acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur’ (1973: 43). As it stands this could be read as a rather minimal requirement suggesting that when entering the pitch, you are aware that it is a game of football you are about to participate in and not some other activity, and that your behaviour reflects that knowledge. You accept that you play football and that you will be judged as a football player, i.e. by the constitutive rules of the game. Suits, however, wanted a more substantial understanding of the required lusory attitude, which led him to argue that ‘to break a game rule is to render impossible the attainment of an end’ … one cannot (really) win the game unless one plays it, and one cannot (really) play the game unless one obeys the rules of the game’ (1978: 39). The upshot of this line is that if you break the rules of a game or a sport, then – logically speaking – you are no longer playing that game or sport, and subsequently you cannot win the competition you seemingly are part of. You cannot cheat, i.e. wilfully violate rules of a sport and at the same time play that sport. Morgan calls this the ‘logical incompatibility thesis’ (1987: 1). One could perhaps make a case for the logical incompatibility thesis with regard to games like chess. If you move your knight three squares horizontally and one square vertically, you are just not playing chess anymore. However, with regard to football, Suits’s line flies in the face of facts. Consider the last World Cup and the taking of corner kicks. In the FIFA Laws of the Game under ‘Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct’ it is stated that ‘[a] direct free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player commits any of the following three offences: holds an opponent’. We doubt if there were many corner-kick situations in the last World Cup where no one was holding an opponent. Still, there were games of football going on while players were holding and tugging on each other’s shirts. Here, we better stick to the minimal interpretation of Suits’s requirement 4, even though this was not Suits’s own reading (see Borge, 2010b: 159–64 for a further discussion of the obligations of footballers when entering a football match).

Requirements 5 and 6 are supposed to distinguish sports from games of chance like lottery, roulette, and so on, and mere games like chess. Football fulfils both. The requirement of skills being involved for an activity or practice to count as a sport is uncontroversial. Note, however, that this does not exclude chance from sports. In the next section we will argue that due to the mechanics of football, i.e. the way the sport is set up, chance plays a bigger role in football than
other sports and that that is part of the attraction of football. Those activities wholly determined by chance, like roulette and lotteries, are not sports: there are no skills involved when playing them. Moreover, even in lower leagues, skills play a big enough role for football to fulfil the requirement unproblematically. There might be intermediate cases with regard to the ratio between skills and chance where it is not clear whether an activity should count as a sport or not. Given that sports are social kinds (i.e. socially constructed), not natural kinds, there will be borderline cases between sports and non-sports, and perhaps there is no fact of the matter with regard to how chancy a sport can be and still be a sport. In any case, in football physical skills are centrally involved in the sport and that makes it a typical or paradigmatic sport.

Requirement 6, on the other hand, is more controversial as it, for example, rules out chess as a sport. McFee mentions twice that chess is regarded as a sport in Cuba (2004: 19, 46). On the other hand, there is an argument to be made that the physicality of football – that bodies move in time and space – is essential to football, but not to chess (see Tamboer, 1991). Imagine two clairvoyant persons playing chess with each other. They would not need to move either their bodies or the physical chess pieces. Still, they would be playing chess. Call this version of chess mind-chess. Mind-chess is still recognisable as chess. Then imagine two teams of 22 clairvoyant persons who in a similar manner undertake to play mind-football. The first thing to notice is that there is a question of whether mind-football would even be possible as there would be no physical limitations to constrain the actions on their pitch of the mind. How to decide who wins the header, the tackle, and so on, in mind-football? And even if it were possible, unlike chess where it makes no principled difference between actions in the mind and physical movement of bodies, mind-football is just not football. Mind-football is something different in kind. The skills of football are essentially physical.

Suits’s last two requirements for something being a sport are also fulfilled by football. However, even though ‘Suits makes it clear that what he is ruling out are mere fads’, there is nothing ‘logically improper about imagining a sport that does not persist substantially over time’ (McNamee, 2008: 15). Philosophically the last two clauses are ill thought through. That football has a wide following with a wide level of stability is a sociologically significant fact, but it seems philosophically irrelevant for understanding what a sport is and why football is one of these sports. The other clauses seem to capture something significant about those sports we at least think of as paradigmatic or prototypical sports, and that indicates that football is a prototypical sport. Empirical research supports this. In a study from James Hampton and Margaret Gardiner football heads the table for typicality (1983: 512; see also Hampton 1987: 71, on what people take as relevant properties for sports and games, and which attributes are rated as more important for each of the two concepts).

The nature of the game

Whereas Suits concentrated his philosophical efforts on the question of what an activity must look like for it to be called a game and a sport, others have looked closer at individual sports and identified various types of sports. David Best suggested that we distinguish between purposive and aesthetic sports (1974: 201–2, 1978: 103–5). Purposive sports are sports where ‘the aesthetics is relative unimportant’ and ‘the aim, purpose or end can be specified independently of the manner of achieving it as long as it conforms to the limits set by the rules or norms – for example, scoring a goal’ (Best, 1974: 201). Aesthetic sports on the other hand are those where ‘the purpose cannot be considered apart from the manner of achieving it’ (Best, 1974: 202). Football is a purposive sport and if Best is correct in identifying manner of executing play with aesthetics, then aesthetic considerations are not woven into the constitution of the game. That
does not mean that aesthetic experiences are not to be found in football by the players or the spectators, only that manner of play is not part of football’s regulatory blueprint. Or, to put it in a Suitsian vein, the aesthetic considerations are not part of football’s constitutive rules. In football a goal is a goal and for the result of a particular match it does not matter how a goal was scored. The goalscorer takes them any way he or she can – ‘the hallmark of a born goal-scorer – give them the merest hint of a goal and they’ll pounce. They don’t care what part of their anatomy the ball comes off, as long as it finishes in the back of the net’ (Dalglish, 1996: viii).

Among some of the purposive sports that Best mentions we can distinguish between what Joseph Kupfer (1983: 457–63) called quantitative/linear sports and competitive sports, and Steffen Borge dubbed measurement sports and constructive–destructive sports (2010a: 24–5). The defining feature of measurement sports is that winning a singular competition is settled by reference to a measurement; who ran fastest, who jumped highest, who threw longest, who lifted heaviest, and so on. The meritocratic standards for these types of competitions are realised by measuring a physical phenomenon, like the time of running, the distance of the throw, and so on. Another feature of measurement sports is that the sport activity could, in principle, be done independently of other competitors. How fast one runs, how high one jumps, how long one throws, how heavy one lifts, and so on, are not directly a result of the other competitors’ performance. Indirectly, however, competitors in measurement sport competitions usually influence each other’s performance. While there are personal bests and worsts, evaluating one’s performance requires the existence of standards understood socially and historically: the best long jumper in school; the best javelin thrower in the club; the strongest woman in the world; and so on. The influence though is not due to the mechanics of measurement sports themselves, but rather because of the psychological make-up of human competitors and the social contexts in which the practices of sport arise. A human high jumper will raise the bar, both literally and competitive-wise, if other high jumpers in the competition do well. This tells us something important about the nature of human motivation and its role in competitions, but not about high jumping as a measurement sport. Some complex measurement sports like running the marathon and bicycle racing (in particular road bicycle racing competitions like the Tour de France) often involve tactics and strategy. Here it must be admitted that the performances of others in the competition directly influence each competitor’s game plan. So there is an aspect of these latter sorts of measurement sports that involve considerations about how the other competitors behave, though there are no direct hindering actions. Examples of measurement sports are track and field, weightlifting and archery.

Football is not a measurement sport. Football is a sport with a dual nature. Football is a constructive–destructive sport. The defining feature of constructive–destructive sports is that winning a singular competition is settled by reference to a conventionally decided way to count the score of the competition, or by one of the competitors being unable to continue the competition. Another essential feature of constructive–destructive sports is that the sport activity could not be done without the other competitor. Kupfer calls them ‘essentially social’ (1983: 459). How well you perform in a football match is partly a consequence of your opponent’s performance. The nature of a constructive–destructive sport like football is partly, on the constructive side, to aim at constructing, creating or inventing ways to score, while at the same time, on the destructive side, to aim at destroying, preventing or hindering the other team from scoring. This direct-hinder criterion is what sets constructive–destructive sports apart from complex measurement sports like running the marathon and cycle racing. Other examples of constructive–destructive sports are ice hockey, lacrosse and boxing.

Football is furthermore a team sport, which if we follow the American Academy of Pediatrics is a contact sport, but not a collision sport (American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on
The physical contact in the hindering actions of football is forceful and more forceful than some other contact sports like basketball and handball, but not at the same level as collision sports like ice hockey and boxing. Obviously, there is no sharp boundary to be drawn between contact and collision sports, but it seems reasonable to distinguish between the levels of legitimate aggressive intentional body contact present in football and, say, rugby. Among constructive–destructive contact team sports there are of course a wide variety of differences, which are well known. In handball and basketball players can only use the hands (apart from the goalkeeper in handball), while in football players are allowed to use the rest of their bodies, apart from handling the ball (with the exception of the goalkeeper). All these details about the differences between the various constitutive rules of the sports are not very philosophically interesting, though they are important as it is these that at the end of the day are responsible for the differences between the sports. When the constitutive rules of football are put into play we get football.

One philosophically interesting question is why football by far is the most popular team sport, when it is also highly unusual in having very few goals scored in football compared to other sports with a wide following. In the esoteric wall game played at Eton College scoring is rarer than in football, in fact David Winner reports that ‘[g]oals are staggeringly rare’ and that ‘no goal has been scored in the St Andrew’s Day match since 1909’ (2006: 260–1). Compared to the Etonians’ wall game, football is a free-scoring frolic, but compared to all other team sports with a global reach it is a remarkably low-scoring business. Unless one thinks that participants and spectators are by nature more drawn to a game done with one’s feet, than, say, with one’s arms and hands, sticks, then there is reason to believe that the low score of football is one of the main reasons of its success. That and the simplicity of the game; you pretty much just need something round to function as a ball and somewhere to play, and objects determining the goalposts, and you can have a game of football. It is easy to see the simplicity of the game contributing to football’s spread and success. The low score in football matches being a major contributor to the sport’s success, on the other hand, should strike one as curious. Look at a football match and its audience. The highlights of the game are the goals. It is the scoring of a goal that makes the crowd erupt in celebration and send the goalscorer screaming and gesticulating in joy and wonder – think Marco Tardelli losing it after scoring the second goal against West Germany in the World Cup final in 1982, or any Filippo Inzaghi goal. One would think that the more goals, the better. Why then does the sport-watching audience hold fast to football, when there are other ballgames and team sports out there with more goals and with the higher score more excitement? Our suggestion is that the mechanics of football, i.e. how the game is played given its constitutive rules, makes the hindering actions of the destructive side of football easier than creating goals, and that in turn makes for a denser and darker drama where chance plays a bigger role than in other sports.3

Kupfer notes that ‘[t]he complications introduced by human opposition multiply the aesthetic possibilities in competitive sports—dramatic possibilities due to social interactions’ (1983: 463); Borge argues that ‘[f]ootball is about the drama, about the tension and the emotions it provokes’ (2010a: 28); and Lev Kreft has emphasised that ‘[w]hen football is called a beautiful game, it is this universal dramatic character which is described, and not “the aesthetic” used for “aesthetic sports”’ (2014: 370; see also Kreft, 2012). The drama of constructive–destructive sports are different to, say, the drama that emerges in measurement sports, because in the former there is not only the competition that brings in the dramatic, but also the fact that your competitor actively tries to sabotage your performance and chances to win the competition. Furthermore, when there is violence present like it is in contact and collision sports, this also adds to the drama in question and the spectators’ reaction to the competition in question. It is not an accident that
the audience watching a football match behaves in an utterly different fashion than, say, an audience watching a dance performance. Watching aggressive interaction like that we find in contact and collision sports also gets us more excited than the action of an aesthetic sport like floor exercise in gymnastics. What primarily excites us with sports is seeing people compete with each other, and sports with direct physical contact or confrontation are the ones that most often have the most animated audiences. The same might be said of boxing. One might say that the average person’s reason for engaging in sport is based on a primitive impulse: to develop and hone one’s abilities and to do so in a context that affords a public demonstration of superiority. We as spectators are drawn to that. This is the kind of beings we are. Football, *inter alia*, fulfills those impulses, though it ought not to be reduced to those facts (if facts they are).

Apart from the more complex interaction and drama of a constructive–destructive sport and the violence of contact sports, football brings to the table its low scoring due to the mechanics of the game. Sometimes in football the margins between scoring a goal and a near miss are so slim that it seems reasonable to say that it could have gone either way. To acknowledge such slim margins is to acknowledge that there can be an element of chance or luck when it comes to winning football matches. Indeed, one of the important elements of football is the real possibility of surprises in matches between teams that on paper look unevenly matched. The so-called romance of knockout tournaments relies on the element of chance or luck being big enough, or likely enough, so that giant-killings are something that can actually happen and not merely a remote but never actualised possibility. Supporters of small teams go to cup matches against superior teams with the hope that today might be the day where all the margins go their way; today the ball will bounce off the post and out onto the pitch, not into the net, and so on. ‘You never know’, they tell themselves. Small teams might also use playing formations and tactics, which to some extent exploit the possibility of chance. The long-ball tactics of the Norwegian national team, or England’s Wimbledon FC, are perhaps the clearest example of this. Success based on organisational and tactical simplicity can on occasion overcome much more skilled opposition.

Of course, the world being as it is, most of the time the biggest teams with the best players win, but every once in a while, and way more often than in any other sport, the inferior underdog comes out on top. Also, football is a game of skills and the most skilful teams will prevail more often than not. Indeed, if that were not the case, then football would not be a game of skills, but chance. The football cliché of the league table not lying reflects this. Over a whole season, skills at the sport outweigh luck and chance. Nevertheless, in a single match anything (well, at least quite a lot) can happen. Borge writes that ‘[t]he small margins and the element of chance keep football matches more open-ended and unpredictable than all other sports’ and that ‘[f]ootball matches involve many contingencies and it is like life’s own uncertainties have been woven into the very fabric of … football’ (2010a: 32–3), while Kreft notes that the features of football ‘build a dramatic narrative … which simulates dramatic social dimension of the lifeworld so quintessentially well’ (2014: 370).

The drama of football is not only about which teams are the most skilful and will win; it is also about how the dense drama of a single match plays itself out on a particular day. Is this the day the underdog comes out on top? Will the superbly skilful and attack-minded team dazzle the crowd and win the day, or self-implode by lack of defensive rigour and discipline? Will the ultra-defensive team with a by-hook-or-by-crook attitude be able to hold their line and steal the victory? Football by no means guarantees either a fair or happy ending to the show on display. This possibility of a darker, more complex and dense drama is what distinguishes football as a spectator sport from other sports and, we suggest, is responsible for its worldwide success and most likely its (relative) lack of success in North America.
Concluding remarks

Looking at Suits’s analysis of sport we find that football is one of those activities or practices that fulfils all of Suits’s requirements for something being a sport. If one is looking for a prototypical sport, then one need look no further. Football can inter alia be understood as a constructive–destructive contact team sport. Football has two standout features among the constructive–destructive contact team sports. The first standout feature is the simplicity of the game, which makes it easy to play without many resources. The other standout feature is that there are very few goals in football compared to other similar sports. That football is a low-scoring sport, perhaps the lowest-scoring sport with a substantial following, is not a disadvantage, but rather that which explains its worldwide success. It gives its spectators a more unpredictable game and a darker, more complex and denser drama to enjoy.

Notes

1 For geographical reasons (and perhaps a little snobbery), we refer to ‘football’ as opposed to its North American label: soccer.
2 We do not assert here that the constructive–destructive taxonomy is the only one on offer. Brackenridge and Alderson proposed a tripartite sport taxonomy, where football would be considered an anticipation–coordination sport. While there is merit in this classification, we hold that the constructive–destructive understanding is richer and explains better football’s inherent structure.
3 It has been argued by Best (1978) that sports cannot be drama since there is a lack of imagined object. He gives the example of the Leeds United player, Mick Jones who was severely injured in the FA Cup final. But what happened to him, the broken bone, actually happened to him and not the character playing him. While the distinction is a good one, the concept of drama permits a narrow and a broader understanding, and it is the latter we employ here.
4 The sociologist Erich Dunning (1997) has come close to this understanding in his detailed analysis of the configurations underpinning sports, along with its defining idea: the quest for exciting significance.

References


