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# EDITORIAL

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## **Are we spending too much... ...in terms of time, energy, effort and money – that is, on sport in general, sporting events, stadiums and the treatment of sports injuries?**

Sports medicine as a special interest or as a specialty in its own right is growing worldwide. Practices, group practices and even whole institutions dealing with sport injuries have come into being. They are thriving because of an ever-increasing demand for the services they offer.

Although the amount spent on the medical side of sport must be astronomical, it is sure to pale into insignificance when compared to what is spent on the logistical side.

The soccer world cup tournament of 2010 is on our doorstep. Throughout our country people are frantically busy upgrading roads, enlarging airports and erecting new stadiums at a total cost that boggles the mind.

All of this is happening in a world and a country full of hunger, poverty and illness.

Why do we do it? Why do we participate in sport? Why do we support it? Why have we become so fanatical about it?

Is it madness and madness alone, or can we find some sanity in this fanaticism? Is there some method in this madness?

Since ancient times, man was driven by an inborn desire to rule, to conquer and to subject his fellowman. Accounts of almost constant warfare, invasion of neighbouring territories and of enslaving and killing their inhabitants can be found in the Bible. This trend was perpetuated by the Romans, the Vikings and the Hordes of Attila the Hun. There is hardly a country in the world that does not have such a history and in many places it is still happening.

During early years of civilisation organised sporting events were few and far between. Organised warfare and raids on other tribes seem to have been the order of the day. As civilisation progressed, a reversal of this trend gradually took place, subtle and on a small scale at first, but growing as time went by. The first ancient Olympic Games took place in 776 BC and similar events were soon to follow. Soldiers, who were the athletes of the day, were granted leave and guaranteed safe passage through hostile territories to compete in these events. They were even allowed to leave the actual battlefield in order to do so.

Since then many tools of combat have become part of modern-day Olympic events. The javelin replaced the throwing spear. Sword fights became fencing competitions. Archery replaced the more lethal use of the longbow. The warhorse became the show jumper. The snipers of yesterday became the marksmen on the rifle range of today.

In place of opposing armies on the battlefield, we have opted for opposing teams on the playing field. Instead of declaring war on the Australians and invading their country, we send the Springboks to face and conquer the Wallabies on our behalf.

Instead of full-scale battles involving everyone, we pit our champions against theirs to decide the issue. We replaced the spoils of war with medals and trophies. We revere athletes and team captains in place of soldiers and generals. The chariots in triumphal marches became open-top buses. The masses lining the streets are shown the trophies won, instead of wagons loaded with loot and followed by columns of conquered, chained and enslaved human beings.

Many things have changed and many things have remained the same. The game and the rules have changed, but the driving force behind the competition is still the same. The ghastly wounds of war have been replaced by the injuries of sport. The methods of treatment have become more sophisticated, but the need to treat them and the people to do so, remained. The primal instinct to compete and to conquer is still there. The intentional taking of life, limb and freedom to do so, is not. The ultimate outcome of the confrontations still inflames participants and supporters alike. The outcomes of the clashes are less devastating, but the support and the cheering not less fanatical.

It would seem that civilisation did not free man from all forms of inherent 'madness'.

Maybe, however, it did exchange one form of 'madness' for another – 'a madness' less devastating and less costly.

Can we afford to change back?

Are we spending too much?

You be the judge.

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