

## DIVERSITY IN THE WAY OF VIEWING A SPORTING EVENT FROM AN AESTHETIC POINT OF VIEW

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46733/PESH241311711>  
(Original scientific paper)

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### Abstract

*Sporting events have long captivated human interest, serving as both participatory activities and spectator spectacles. The significance of sports may not align with life's gravest concerns, yet the essence of games continues to hold a profound place in human culture. Historically, people have engaged with sports either as players or viewers, cultivating a rich diversity of opinions and emotional investments. This engagement generates a unique relationship between the spectacle of the sport and its spectators, which is complex and multifaceted. This relationship, though asymmetrical and uncodified, bestows meaning upon both the event and the audience. In recent years, the philosophy of sports has explored this phenomenon extensively. Stephen Mumford, in his book "Watching Sport: Aesthetics, Ethics and Emotion," delves into the perceptual experience of sports spectators, questioning who derives greater enjoyment from sports—purists or partisans. Mumford argues that the partisan's competitive perception of the game diminishes the aesthetic pleasure of watching sports. This paper aims to critically analyze Mumford's distinction between purists and partisans, examining the arguments supporting and refuting his thesis. Additionally, it will explore a nuanced perspective that transcends the binary classification of purists and partisans, acknowledging a more complex spectrum of spectatorship.*

**Key Words:** aesthetics, sports, partisan, purist.

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### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to critically discuss the main thesis of Mumford (2012) who attempts to defend the sports purists attitude as the best option for watching a sporting event in relation to the aesthetic experience that a spectator can engage in. On the other hand, he considers that the partisans attitude is a wrong way of watching sports, stressing that excessive focus on winning, excessive passion and competitiveness create the conditions for a situation of complete loss of aesthetic recruitment.

### Discussion

#### *Defining Purists and Partisans*

Stephen Mumford in his book "Watching Sport: Aesthetics, ethics and emotion", attempts to discover this perceptual experience, which may require philosophical training as well as a sharp eye, referring to the experience of the spectator. Mumford (2012) discusses the two main ways of viewing sport, that of the partisan and that of the purist, questioning who watches or enjoys the spectacle better. His main claim (thesis) is that the competitive perception of the match from the perspective of the partisan alters the aesthetic pleasure he receives. Mumford's (2012) justification for this claim is made on several grounds. Categorizing them himself, Mumford writes that there are competing a) psychological and b) ethical or aesthetic arguments that may judge diversity in viewing. Some of them are as follows:

1. Partisans are probably more familiar with watching a sports match wanting their team to win and always prefer an "ugly" win to a "good" or possibly exciting loss.
2. Partisans often indulge in raucous cheers and boos, interpreting the referees' decisions with a rather slanted eye and feeling joy and sorrow depending on the fortunes of their team, sometimes perhaps in an alarming way.
3. The partisans always seem to maintain a fan attitude because part of the fascination of the whole process is how the opponents react to the pressure and noise of the boos, but also to the changes in the behavior of the fans who may enjoy this fan encouragement.

4. Partisans miss moments of beauty like a nice pass by the opposing team because they are only focused on their team winning.
5. Purists, on the other hand, appreciate the complexity and inherent beauty of the sport, regardless of the outcome.
6. Purists forego the joy of rivalry because they pursue different satisfactions.
7. Purists experience a more sophisticated experience that matches the higher pleasures of the Mill. For example during a game a purist may lose his intended impartiality either positively due to the unexpected joy or courage of a player, or conversely, negatively, in reaction to the bad behavior of some other participants in the match.

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze these arguments after they have been presented. For this purpose this work is divided into three parts. The first presents Mumford's distinction of purist from partisan and then analyzes Mumford's rebuttal to Elliott's (1974) position that the competitive perception of the game from the partisans perspective enhances aesthetic enjoyment. The third section will develop arguments from At the end, the point of view that examines the existence of spectators who cannot be classified in the narrow framework of the fan-fan dichotomy, but in something more expanded and perhaps more complex, will be cited.

### ***Purist – Partisan***

A purist is a person who prefers to follow the events of sports in general, - without excluding the fact that he can be a fan, a friend of a specific team -, but knows how to respect the opponent and applaud him. On the other hand, partisan, is a fanatic and does not respect the opponent, while there is no way to applaud him yet and when he emerges victorious, presenting a better image. He is a partizan of a particular team and usually a team sport and rarely an individual one, his fanaticism is more extreme and he is likely to purchase the team's shirt with pride, identifying himself as the most enthusiastic fan and watching most of the matches closely. Quite often he will follow his team to away games looking forward to the next game. At this point we will refer to Crawford's (2004) view that the mass media tends to focus on the extreme behaviors of partisans while possibly most of the time the fans may be behaving politely, creating a climate of violence and fear. But it is an element that we will not focus on in this particular work.

As a personal experience Mumford will report that from 1980 to 1998 he followed a club in the north of England closely and on several occasions had reached the limits of obsessive support. He had procured a season ticket by following his team continuously for the entire season which usually lasts up to 9 months. As soon as one game was over, he couldn't wait for the moment when his team faced the next opponent. If the team got a positive result, everything was good, but when it didn't, then he fell into a depressed mood which over time led him to the conclusion that this attitude should be abandoned. In 1998 he decided to become a purist.

Looking deeper into Mumford's view we will refer to the fact that the purist is a fan of a sport, who may love it enough, but have no allegiance to any particular team. He can watch matches and enjoy them even though he has no preference as to which of the two teams will win. At this point, he will refer to the -incorrect for him- opinion held by Dixon (2001) who stated that the purist is the one who during a game chooses -according to his progress- which team he will support. This to Mumford suggests the erratic behavior of a partisan rather than a purist. The purist enjoys a game in a different way than the partisan and can positively accept how the two teams compete, the tactics they follow, but also how the coaches adapt to the systems. The purist according to Mumford can enjoy skilled players competing against each other, and want both sides to compete to the best of their abilities. On the other hand, a partisan can be very happy if the opposing team does not perform or when the game does not have enough phases, as long as the team they support is the final winner. For the purist, it is certainly preferable to see a good game without depending on the enjoyment he will get from the result, because as mentioned above, he is not a supporter of either of the two competing teams.

Mumford (2012) will try to defend purist, against those who argue that it is not the best option for watching a sporting event, considering that the partisan sensibility is the wrong way to watch, while the purist attitude is more aesthetically functional. He will use two kinds of arguments, one psychological and the other moral although he is not a fanatic of psychology. He will accept that a part of the partisans watches a match in a particular way, i.e. has a competitive perception, while the purist's attitude is more aesthetic. For the moral argument, he considers the attitude of lack of excessive faith more commendable, although a character flaw may be presented in this case. The psychological argument derives the supposed benefits

that the individual gains by supporting a group. Some of these relate to the experience of watching a sporting event but there are wider benefits as well.

Wan et al. (2001) will refer to the fact that a sports fan has a psychological benefit from watching and maybe it is something that regulates his depression or behavior. But Mumford's experience as a partisan of a losing team shows just the opposite. It could all have led to a more severe clinical depression from which I never came down, Mumford will point out. Having broader interests in one's life without narrow boundaries and brackets and away from personal concerns and passions seems to be psychologically beneficial and necessary, in a way. It is also beneficial to be interested in sports and in particular a team, close friends who may participate as supporters of that team and with whom strong social bonds may very likely be formed. This phenomenon may be more likely to occur in teams that are local in character, perhaps small town teams, which instills pride even when the team may be failing.

Dixon (2001) argues that the partisan feels that he transcends the local or spatial boundaries of his area by supporting a team that is successful and famous. He will tell us that this gives one possible explanation why the partisan seems to be more attached to team sports than to individual ones, where teams usually represent nations, cities, towns, and sometimes ideologies, sectors of society, or political tendencies. In these cases the partisan is drawn in or possibly involved in what the team represents and is asked to be a part of it. In the opposite case, the players of individual sports mainly represent themselves, without excluding the fact that the players themselves carry the emblem of a country. But usually, for example in athletics, the emblem of a country is likely to be carried by more than one athlete, making it a disincentive for fans to feel a connection with any individual athlete. In team sports, the team comes first, whereas in individual sports, the unit has the first say.

### ***Competitive perception***

The benefits of partisan attitude that we mentioned above are perhaps indirect consequences of watching sports matches, but at this point we will refer to something that exists, is more immediate and more substantial and lies in the point where the fan enjoys a better game. It is a view of Elliott (1974) who had said the following:

*The purist does not fully enjoy a football match unless he has an interest in the victory of one side or the other. We have no right to tell him that he should adopt a detached aesthetic attitude unless we can assure him that by doing so he will gain more than he loses. In reality he will win very little and lose more (Elliott, 1974, in Mumford, 2012).*

In his words, Elliott (1974) argues that the purist loses all the appeal of watching sports, which is mainly focused on its competitive nature. He can observe that a dribble in football is very likely to succeed and have an effect, but he cannot feel the threat that a partisan would feel if his team were in danger of conceding a goal. Certainly not the joy and excitement that someone can feel when their team reaches the point of achieving its goal. He considers a purist to notice a player's fall on the grass or a clumsy bounce of the ball as a flaw in the game but for a partisan it adds excitement. All of this leads Elliott to the conclusion that the purist sees only a simplified or somewhat simplistic version of the game devoid of any competitive aspect.

Mumford will tell us that there is something psychologically plausible about this perspective. Sports fans often find a sporting event exciting if they favor one of the two teams to win. When the ball approaches the goal they feel excitement or on the other hand they feel pressure or possibly even fear when the opponents attack dangerously. All these feelings are more intense in a partisan than in a purist, who can simply experience a relatively calm enjoyment. Scoring a goal brings such an intense thrill to a partisan that the purist could never hope to get. The idea that partisans who watch a game that doesn't include their team often don't get the competitive perception they're looking for is something we need to analyze.

An example of this behavior concerns a well-known American philosopher, David Lewis, who often visited Australia. The story goes that at a football match where the team he supported was not participating, he thought it would be much more exciting to toss a coin to choose which team to defend, because he saw no reason to side with either. This kind of dilemma may in some cases not be so arbitrary, and the choice may be judged by the color of the team but also by its playing style. By extension, this competitive perception sought by the partisan contradicts the purely aesthetic perception of the fan. All the actions of the match can be perceived through the lens of competition. A shot on goal is seen as more than what it can be, an opportunity to achieve the ultimate goal. The above makes Mumford convinced that the competitive perception is indeed quite important in a match. He had once attended a match in Scotland where, in many cases, football has a sectarian and inter-city rivalry. In this particular case one group came from Edinburgh

and represented Protestantism while the other group from Glasgow was considered Catholic. The fans were quite passionate and actively participated throughout the game, complaining to the referee about any decision that did not favor their team. In one characteristic phase Hearts fans protested a throw-in which was clearly Celtic. Mumford will refer to the fact that while he was sitting next to a Hearts fan and had the same angle as him, he nevertheless reacted strongly. Indeed the opinion of the Hearts fan was that the ball had come off an opponent's foot.

The philosophy of science, specifically a thesis known as dependence on observation theory, will help us at this point. This is an old idea from Kuhn in 1962. This theory's position on what we see and observe is largely a result of a theory we hold about it, meaning that our beliefs and desires can determine what we see. . That is, it is not that one sees something and then forms a belief or some theory about the object he observes but instead the theory can determine what he actually sees. Mumford maintains his reservations about this conception because in its most radical form it is potentially unrealistic and to some extent skeptical, while we cannot ignore the fact that it can leave us trapped in a belief system without empirical checks, limited to theory . He will propose a more moderate version of Khun's (1962) theory by saying that there can be cases where our perceptions cannot be influenced by beliefs to an unlimited extent. This has also been claimed by Denette (1991) in the multiple plans model. In this model each sensory stimulus is either considered individually or combined with a previous stimulus without the intervention of consciousness. We perceive the external world in small individual pieces that resemble blueprints, and these when unified form an overall conscious experience. Consciousness does not appear as soon as we perceive something but is the result of a continuous processing of information. Essentially for Mumford the prevailing view is that we should resist the relativistic conclusion that a person's perception is almost always correct by holding that a fan's impartiality or unbiased perception is more reliable than a fan's.

After analyzing the psychological argument, let's look at the moral one. First of all we will refer to the opinion of Dixon (2001) who defends the partisan in a different way. He believes that a partisan can have a moderate and not extreme behavior. The definitions he gives for the partisans are that he is a supporter of a team with which he can have a personal relationship and familiarity, while on the other hand he considers a purist the spectator who supports a team he believes exemplifies the virtues he seeks but his faith but she is flexible. Mumford argues that Dixon's view is flawed and does not consider the purist's faith to be flexible, simply choosing to observe all the beauty and drama that a sporting event represents regardless of the winner. He believes that a real supporter of the virtues of the sport could not have a partisan loyalty, a loyalty that is to a single team because the ideal for him is that the opponents face each other in the best possible way. He will emphasize that fandom for Dixon and indeed the moderate partisan may become a supporter of a team from the colors or through an acquaintance or friend, judging it very random, which is not based anywhere rationally and therefore for him it is a random circumstance. Dixon (2001) considers the attitude of the partisan to be more ethical because his choice is based on love and generosity and he uses as an example the love of a couple for their children, judging it as something stable that does not fluctuate according to events and circumstances. circumstances. On the contrary, the purist's behavior for Dixon presents a character flaw mainly due to the lack of emotional ties and consequently an inability to develop in empathy. Purists for Dixon (2001) do not put close personal relationships in the frame but in the background.

Responding to Dixon (2001), Mumford will emphasize that this attachment and this special love is often unhealthy showing signs of obsession and perhaps anti-social behavior that very often leads to violence. Supporting the moderate partisan who also has the characteristics of the purist is prima facie a good thing because it can combine the special loyalty of the partisan, which is tempered by the purist's awareness that teams that misbehave or break the rules or the spirit of the game do not deserve our support. Likewise the moderate partisan may stop supporting a team that wrongly exploits its supporters and may condemn violence. Mumford will emphasize that moderation is not bad but he considers the ideal viewing attitude of the purist because he believes that any sign or attitude of fandom does not aim at anything substantial in terms of sports viewing. He will use the example of friendship, saying characteristically that we all seek to have friends, and certainly we are never in the mood to put some of them on a higher level. So it will be based on the fact that this prioritization of preferences and choices in the area of sports viewing is not prefer

Mumford sees the purist as having a deeper and more satisfying enjoyment of the game, and his passion for the sport is calmer, which as Hume (1739–40) notes can sometimes be mistaken for something that does not it's passion. But it is indeed a passion, it is an interest and a concern and it is certainly a source of pleasure and enjoyment. He is pleased with the finer things, he appreciates the game for its aesthetic

qualities, his pleasure is not determined or derived solely from the result and thus this enables him to focus on other matters such as grace, playing style, tactics, etc. .

At this point we could add other categories of partisans or purists that we think would be able to expand the categories of viewers we are investigating. We refer to the spectators who behave like partisans in a sport such as football and maintain a purists attitude in all other sports. In this case the partisan expresses his passion for the particular team of the particular sport and on the other hand, enjoys the grace of sports viewing in the rest of the spectrum of sports. Additionally, we consider it appropriate to mention the case of viewers who can control their passion or temper it at will, creating a tier that essentially ranks viewers according to their percentage of commitment, passion, enjoyment and emotion. In our opinion, the strict division and any observance of seals is limiting, but surely more investigation and introspection is requiredable.

### Conclusions

In summary, we have referred to the two viewing perspectives, which have a completely different perception. The partisans fail to perceive the aesthetic side of a sports match which offers freedom from all worries and all forms of drama. They seek victory by any means, and competition is the way that will lead to victory, not defeat. But the passions and the search for the highest pleasures are not necessarily accompanied by a partisan attitude, on the contrary, the purist, having a much wider circle of interests, is protected from the strong fluctuations of psychology, enjoying the game. For Mumford there does not seem to be any real argument in favor of fandom and essentially suggests a cleaner stance without ruling out the fact of categorizing viewing. A categorization that runs along a spectrum, in which one can forego the emotional ups and downs of a win or a loss, to something smoother in which the pleasure is less intense but more satisfying. He considers that there can be a scale of fandom or purism behavior but does not enter into the essence of this thought, preferring the existence of strict watertight concepts.

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