

What Does a Professional Athlete Deserve?

GOTTFRIED SCHWEIGER

Paris Lodron University of Salzburg,
Centre for Ethics and Poverty Research, Mönchsberg 2a, A-5020 Salzburg
gottfried.schweiger@sbg.ac.at

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I sketch a possible answer to the question of what professional athletes deserve for their sporting activities. I take two different backgrounds into account. First, the content and meaning of desert is highly debated within political philosophy and many theorists are sceptical if it has any value for social justice. On the other hand sport is often understood as a meritocracy, in which all prizes or wins should be solely awarded based on merit. I will distinguish three possible goods that can be deserved for doing professional sport – money, social status and appreciation – and show that athletes deserve them according to their achievements and that this justifies certain inequalities in their distribution. These legitimate disparities have nevertheless been embedded within a broader framework of social justice, which limits them based on a strong understanding of social equality.

KEYWORDS: Desert, justice, professional athletes, social esteem.

A professional athlete is a person that engages in sport for a living and not just as a hobby. Professional athletes do this at many different levels of proficiency, in different forms of organisation and get different things for doing their sporting activities. But what do professional athletes deserve for what they do and is what they get deserved? There are two possible approaches to this question. First, the whole question is flawed and answered by the fact of what athletes actually get. This approach leaves the answer to the market or any other person or institution that is willing to give something to people that do sport professionally. They have to decide what standards they want to use and it would be nonsense to interfere with them because they are arbitrary in nature. The second approach is to suggest that it is possible to 'objectively' determine what professional athletes should get, and they should get that, and if they do not it is unjust or if they get more or something else this might be then undeserved. This second line of argument is also open for a debate on when and how a third party should or has to step in and demand

a correction of what athletes get. In reality both approaches often come in mixed forms and people argue with 'objective' criteria that are in fact arbitrary and not really open for debate.

An elite athlete in discus throwing gets much less of certain goods such as money, social status or media attention than a mediocre football player in the English Premier League. People that are in favour of the first approach will say that this difference is fair and that both athletes get what they deserve. People that want to follow the second approach can also come to this conclusion but they need to give at least some reasons to justify this distribution of rewards. Many claim that it is the market that decides what and how much athletes should get and that it is not only unnecessary but even unfair to interfere with it. Then the 'objective' criterion for desert is only what the market is willing to give or pay. Other criteria can be introduced by those following the second approach. It could be argued that the football player entertains many more people and football is much more profitable, so the player has a claim to get much more paid than a discus thrower whose sport only exists because the public finances it and is hardly followed by anyone. These are legitimate reasons and they can in fact support the claim that – in this example – both athletes get what they deserve. However, as soon as the debate begins, and reasons for and against are pondered, this opens the possibility to include or exclude other reasons or to weight them differently. For example one could argue that a world-class discus thrower has to work harder, that he has to overcome many more obstacles to become as good as he is, that the competition is harder because he cannot hide behind teammates or that throwing a discus exemplifies ethical values while the brutality of football undermines them. So one could conclude that the discus thrower deserves more than the football player and that what they actually get is unfair. Then one can either fall back to the first approach and claim that whatever the counter arguments are, both get what they deserve because it is useless to debate about the arbitrary reasons someone might have to give a football player more than a discus thrower. One could also stick within the discussion and argue why these arguments in favour of the discus thrower are weaker than those for the football player. However, as many people will add, even if there are good reasons why a discus thrower does not get what he deserves and that the football player gets too much, nobody has any right to intervene. In the end it is a free market, and with that the discussion is over.

Obviously, from a philosophical point of view this is not satisfying or at least not satisfying if one does not trust the market that much and has good reasons to think that market outcomes can be seriously flawed and that an intervention is sometimes necessary and obliged. The question of what a professional athlete deserves reflects all the difficulties there are with the concept

of desert and the idea of distributing goods through a market in general. It is highly questionable that the market produces fair results but it is just as questionable in deciding what other way of determining desert should be used (Olsaretti 2004). Some theorists are in favour of dropping the idea of desert at all, while others have countered these concerns within a framework of social justice that argues for an extensive equal distribution of basic goods and only leaves surplus goods and benefits to be distributed according to desert.

Nonetheless it is not a just a useless academic debate to reflect on what professional athletes deserve. The concept of desert is an important feature for the shaping of modern, capitalist societies and is therefore also inevitable connected with all the problems that arise in such societies. The question of what people deserve, and therefore also the question of what athletes deserve, are closely connected issues of social justice. This is true for all athletes but the problem is maybe best displayed by those multi-millionaire athletes that are quite common in modern elite sports. These high salaries certainly pose questions of social justice (Schweiger 2012). For example, Prince Fielder, a baseball player in Major League Baseball in the USA, has signed a new contract in 2012 paying him \$214 million over the next ten years, which is as much as the combined annual salary of 555 'normal' full-time workers (the annual median salary of a full-time worker was \$38532 in 2010). Does he deserve that contract and on what grounds? Is it a violation of justice to pay one man so much more, while many others live in poverty? Very few other people earn \$214 million, so Fielder has to do something very special and very deserving. It is without any the doubt that he is an exceptional ball player but to question if he deserves what he gets is based on the general claim that every inequality needs to be justified. At least from a philosophical point of view asking for reasons is legitimate and not only a subjective amusement. \$214 million is then not only much more than most other people in the USA and the world will ever earn, it is also obvious that this money could be used for a lot of good things to help people living in poverty, being chronically ill or have other special needs.

So, again, why do a few elite athletes deserve to be millionaires, while others just earn a decent living and many only the friendly applause of their friends? What is the relationship between these differences and the idea of social justice as a regulative idea for the distribution of benefits and burdens? I will not try to answer all the different aspects of these questions but rather sketch some parts of an answer. I will do this in three steps. First, the concept of desert and its place in social justice has to be discussed. Then the relevant dimensions of desert in professional sports have to be outlined and in the third step I will develop a social philosophical framework for evaluating what professional athletes should get in relation to what they deserve.

Desert, Justice and Recognition

Many theories of social justice – especially in distributive justice – following John Rawls dismiss desert as a justifiable or useful principle – because it is in itself flawed or impracticable or leads to unjust results – and advocate that benefits and burdens should be distributed based on other grounds (Rawls 1972). Others like the conception of David Miller have tried to develop a sense of desert which can be understood as an important feature of social justice that can not be substituted by other principles (Miller 1999). One of the latter theories is the recognition approach of Axel Honneth, which aims to understand social justice as incorporating three different modes of recognition: personal relationships and care; respect and rights; social esteem and solidarity (Honneth 1996; Honneth 2003). The founding idea of this approach is the assumption that the experience of these modes of recognition is the necessary precondition for living a good life and that they can describe what is morally asked in social interaction and relations. The content of such a good life is open to change and individual preferences but Honneth claims that it can be conceptualized in a way that it is thick enough to serve as a normative basis for social critique and a theory of justice. The key point of any good life is the idea of self-realization, which does not prescribe any content but rather its form as the possibility to live a life one has good reasons to choose to live. Recognition is of instrumental value, because it enables such a good life, and of value itself, because it describes the morally right way of interaction between persons. This rests on two different lines of argument, of which, one can be called an anthropological justification, and the other a social or political justification.

The anthropological justification claims that recognition is in fact not only something every human needs but that it responds to those features of human life that are of ethical value: vulnerability, autonomy and peculiarity. The first and basic mode of recognition, personal relationships and care, reflects the vulnerability of the human that is always in danger of being violated by others. The second mode of recognition, respect and rights, is what humans owe each other because they recognise each other as autonomous beings. Equal rights for all members of a society are the social realization of this respect. The third form of recognition, social esteem and solidarity, is necessary because every human is part of social relations as a peculiar individual who contributes to shared goals and tasks. The three modes of recognition are therefore understood as ethically adequate responses to these three features of human life, without which a good life is impossible.

The social or political justification claims that the three modes of recognition describe important spheres of social life that shape an individual's life chances. Modern societies shape the ways in which personal relationships can

happen, they have a certain form of legal system and they organize the way in which social esteem is distributed amongst their members. These spheres are value-laden, which leads to struggles for recognition or struggles over the right interpretation of these values within them. These facilitate social change and, over the course of time, can lead to a more inclusive society. So, the social justification aims to show that modern societies institutionalise recognition and that this is not only an analytical category but allows for deeper insights into the social embedding of normative claims.

Both the anthropological and the political justification converge in that the experience of recognition, both in its individual and its social forms, forms the intersubjective conditions for realising oneself and that this is the key point for social justice. A society is socially just insofar as it secures and protects the possibilities to experience recognition, and in which the institutionalisation of recognition is shaped in a form that can provide the social structures for these experiences. The content of self-realisation and a good life are then open for an individual to decide upon and can and should not be determined by society. Honneth views this as the important difference between his and David Miller's approach, which also describes social justice with three similar principles.

To be sure, in contrast to David Miller, who wants to proceed from a comparable pluralism of three principles of justice (need, equality, desert), the tripartite division I propose arises neither from mere agreement with the empirical results of research on justice, nor from a social-ontological distinction between patterns of social relations, but rather from reflection on the historical conditions of personal identity-formation. Because we live in a social order in which individuals owe the possibility of an intact identity to affective care, legal equality, and social esteem, it seems to me appropriate, in the name of individual autonomy, to make the three corresponding recognition principles the normative core of a conception of social justice. (Honneth 2003: 181–82)

Desert plays an important role in this recognition approach because it is key for the third mode of recognition, social esteem and solidarity. Social esteem is what people claim for their peculiar contributions to a shared goal and, for Honneth, this mainly takes place within the labour market (Honneth 2010; Schmidt am Busch 2010). To put it differently: social esteem is what people deserve for being an economically productive member of a social context. Social esteem is not necessarily bound to be distributed by a market and can also be claimed and perceived in non-market contexts such as the family, for a hobby or in any club. Sport is one such area for social esteem. The reason to conceptualise the labour market as the most important sphere of desert is because modern societies can be reconstructed as 'working societies' in which work and labour are not only the predominant activities but have much deeper influence (Dejours and Deranty 2010). In all modern societies,

work is the main source of income, social security, self-esteem, status and recognition and its absence is the main source for denigration, social exclusion and poverty (Gallie and Paugam 2000). This may not be true for all, but it is for most of the population. Honneth writes about the connection of social esteem and work:

A mere glance at studies of the psychological effects of unemployment makes it clear that the experience of labor must be assigned a central position in the model emerging here. The acquisition of that form or recognition that I have called social esteem continues to be bound up with the opportunity to pursue an economically rewarding and thus socially regulated occupation. (Honneth 2007a: 75)

However, this is only contingent justification for the importance of the labour market and the recognition approach could also take this as a starting point for a critique of the labour market based on this approach to social esteem. Such a social critique is necessary to uncover the various forms of injustice that are happening on the labour market which arise from a distortion of social esteem which can in fact be used to criticise these injustices. It is not the principle of desert that justifies exploitation, alienation or discrimination, which are common in modern labour markets but it rather is the result of a labour market which is dominated by the interests and powers of a few, which ignore or undervalue the contribution of so many. These developments can then be analysed as social pathologies that are characterised by the widespread experience of disrespect and other forms of moral harm under the guise of recognition (Honneth 2007b). However, such pathologies do not undermine the positive and moral core of recognition and of desert. Justice is often used to justify injustice; this does not undermine the idea of justice but rather a certain interpretation. The normative weight of desert arises from both the anthropological claim that it is a necessary feature of human life that is an important constituent of the possibility to live a good life and from the political claim that it can serve as a viable basis for social critique and social change. Both are important for social justice.

The place of desert within a recognition based approach to social justice is that it should be the guiding principle to distribute such benefits and burdens that are connected to contributions for which one is responsible within a social context, of which the labour market is the most important one in 'working societies'. It is not that all possible benefits and burdens are attached to desert. The two other modes of recognition, care and respect, are not to be violated by the 'achievement principle', which is rather based on them. Only in a society in which its members live in such conditions where the experience of care and respect is secured and protected, can social esteem unfold its normative function properly. Still then it is always in danger of being distorted or used to denigrate, humiliate or exclude others.

Is this framework strong enough though to justify the principle of desert against the most apparent objection: that it is impossible to determine for what people are really responsible and what is the consequence of natural talent for which one cannot claim any credit? First, the recognition approach limits the scope of desert and understands it as a complementary principle only. It criticises theories that put forward that all benefits and burdens should be distributed according to desert. Second, that desert is an important category in everyday moral reasoning and in the shaping of modern societies is undoubted and the recognition approach understands itself as situated within these social practices rather than claiming a god's eye view on them. This is what Honneth and others call internal or immanent critique, which tries to unfold the moral claims embedded in them (Kauppinen 2002). Third, that people claim credit for their actions and that they also react to the actions of others in this way is not only happening all the time, but without it a feature of what makes any life a good one would be missing. It is of intrinsic value that the efforts are recognised and the contributions of each are respected. This can for sure lead to egoism, false pride and rivalry but it is equally important for cooperation and solidarity.

So, the recognition approach does not easily dismiss the critique of desert but rather takes it seriously. It also does not claim that it can solve all theoretical and practical problems that are attached to it or that it can provide a once and for all answer to determine who is responsible for what, but rather argues that there are nonetheless good reasons to think of desert as a valuable principle of justice. Without it an important feature of human life that is relevant for social justice would be ignored.

Difference and Social Esteem in Professional Sports

So far it has only be claimed that desert is an important dimension of social justice but its content has not been further examined. I understand desert as a four-part relation. X deserves A from Y in virtue of B (Kleinig 1971). X is here the professional athlete, while A is what he or she deserves, Y is the addressee of this claim and B is the desert-base. Within the presented framework, it is then just to give each what he or she deserves, and a society that aims to be socially just has to secure such social relations in which this happens. In the case of Prince Fielder the statement can be that he deserves \$214 million from the Los Angeles Angels because he hits a lot of home runs. However, this is just the beginning of the discussion. One can question A and say that Fielder deserves only \$500.000 from the Los Angeles Angels because he hits a lot of home runs. One could also question B and say that he deserves \$214 million, but not for hitting a lot of home runs but rather because he brings

in a lot of money for the Angels. In fact there are unlimited possibilities what Fielder, as a professional athlete, should get from Y in virtue of B.

I will limit my discussion in this paper to the sphere of social esteem, which means as to what an athlete deserves for his or her contribution for which he or she is responsible. I will not discuss whether or not the two other modes of recognition, care and respect, can be deserved and what this would mean in respect to professional sports. The main reason for this limitation is that I want to focus on the peculiarity of professional sports, while care and respect refer to universal features of human life – vulnerability and autonomy. I want to sketch a first systematisation and distinguish three types of benefits. Then I will discuss their relation to different bases of desert.

Social esteem can be received and given in form of material, social or symbolic goods. Examples for material goods are money, housing, food or any other device and material object. Examples for social forms of social esteem can be all different things that people are entitled to do; such things can be inclusion, access, membership or participation in a certain social relation or context. Examples for symbolic goods are any statements of social esteem through communication such as praise or other favourable expressions. The distinctions between these three are always vague, in reality there are overlaps and there are often combinations of all three. It is also common that social and symbolic forms of social esteem are expressed using material carriers such as membership cards, acknowledgments expressed in written forms or trophies whose symbolic worth is only seldom determined by its material.

The value of most goods, whether they be material, social or symbolic in nature, is context-sensitive, which means that they can function and be perceived as beneficial or as detrimental based on the context in which they are received. This is also true for such goods that carry social esteem. To receive money can be a form of social esteem in the context of work, but it can also be denigrating in the context of charity. Even goods such as praise or honour that are most often understood as of intrinsic value can be harmful. If a worker is praised for an accomplishment which was easy to fulfil this praise can be experienced and understood as nothing more than derision and mockery. It is not only important what people get, it is also how they get it and this is also crucial for an understanding of social esteem and desert. So also the general types of benefits I discuss are context-sensitive in this regard and it cannot be said that they are beneficial in every case. This context specificity is limited by social practices and rules that determine what counts as an expression of social esteem and provide guidelines for their sharing. Social esteem is institutionalised and, as discussed in the previous section, the labour market functions as one its main settings. Therefore many of important material, social and symbolic goods are tied to paid work and labour. This

institutionalisation has three important dimensions. First, it limits the possibilities of what is perceived as social esteem, which means that it is also tied to various processes of exclusion. Second, such frameworks provide security and also protection as they can be addressed to justify claims for social esteem. Third, there is a constant flux through which these institutional rules and settings change and develop. These changes can either lead to more inclusive and socially just practices of esteem or they can lead to a more oppressive system, in which the new rules of social esteem only favour the powerful or the interests of few. It is this arena in which struggles for recognition take place and in which it is the task of a theory of social justice to develop models and measures to evaluate different practices of social esteem and desert.

So far I have distinguished three different types of benefits that can be deserved, namely social, symbolic and material goods of social esteem. Their negative counterparts – for example fines, exclusion, and rebuke – can also be deserved but I will focus on these positive forms. I also want to distinguish three different levels on which social esteem can be claimed. People can claim it from other individuals on the micro-level, they can claim it from an organisation or institution on the meso-level or they can claim it from society in general, on the macro-level. Within this framework I will now narrow my discussion to three specific goods of social esteem – money, social status and appreciation. I will ask whether or not they are deserved by professional athletes and on what basis. Therefore, my inquiry does not deal with such questions as what criteria are sufficient to deserve a win or to be named ‘Most Valuable Player’ but rather accept that each sport has its own certain measures of achievements (Kershner 2011).

In general, I distinguish two possible bases of desert – or to put it in other words, there are two possible forms of contribution that justify social esteem: efforts and achievements. One can deserve something for trying and engaging in an activity even if it fails or if one is not very good at it. This model is not only of educational or therapeutic use – to support one’s development or training – but also bears a moral value in itself as to put time and effort into something should not be neglected. One can also deserve social esteem for actually achieving something regardless if it was because of great efforts or if it was because of natural talent or even some luck involved. Both are quite common in social practices and again they describe predominant modes of social esteem in the sphere of work and labour. Stephan Voswinkel has described the on-going shifts to more self-employment within traditional occupations, from fixed salaries to bonus payments and project work and as such a shift from recognizing efforts to recognizing achievements (Voswinkel 2012). The hours worked are no longer the benchmark but the operating numbers regardless of how much time or effort an employee had to put into achieving them.

Also, in professional sports, efforts and achievements can serve as valid desert bases although there is a focus on the latter. One's efforts to score a goal in football can be appreciated but the one who actually scores a goal will be more highly esteemed and one who does always try but never succeeds is in danger of getting cut from the team completely, while the one who does not have to train very often or does not need to work that hard on the field but nevertheless scores from time to time will be viewed as a solid athlete and member of the team. In sports the distinction between efforts and achievements can be blurred and football can just give one example for this. Is to score a goal really an achievement in football or is it rather to win the game or the competition? An individual player might score a lot of goals but his or her team might still lose. Has he or she then only tried to win – which means only shown some efforts – or has he or she actually achieved something by scoring goals? These and other questions arise and they can only be answered for a particular sport but in general professional sports is focussed on achievements and values them more highly than efforts. I think there are good reasons to do so despite the fact that sometimes those who win are not those who worked the hardest or had to overcome the most obstacles but those who are lucky (Simon 2007). Why then say that achievements should be more important for desert than efforts?

First, I do not argue to limit social esteem only to achievements and a strong commitment to efforts is desirable and needed. Second, competition is an intrinsic feature of many sports and especially of professional sports, and to determine achievements (goals, winners, most valuable players, ...) is an essential part of this. Sports is not – or should not be – about achievements at all costs but rather about achieving something within a certain setting and following rules. Equality of opportunity – which is for sure a highly contested concept – is as much an essential feature of professional sports as is winning and losing. William Morgan has rooted this type of 'good' competition in cooperation.

Again, there is nothing wrong with competition per se, or at least a certain moral version of competition that is itself based on cooperation, on a consideration of the interests of others, but there is very definitely something morally worrisome about the kind of competition to which most of these athletes have been exposed, the type that places a premium on winning above all else. (Morgan 2006: 44)

A great deal of the attractiveness of professional sport for its fans comes from seeing athletes or teams compete for victory, viewing them earn it from hard training and the excellence of skill. Third, to prioritise actual achievements before efforts is not restricted to the sphere of sport but has a certain value – also moral value – in itself, that the consequences ultimately matter. One

can think of the following example: is it better to end poverty or to try to end poverty without succeeding?

Now, what is deserved for achievements in professional sports? As said I will look at three different goods of social esteem – money, social status and appreciation – which are of essential value, inside and outside the realm of professional sports. There are two justifications under which they are deserved. One is an argument of fairness, which means that these goods are deserved if other athletes get them for the same achievements. This relational justice is an important part of social esteem and for the distribution of money, social status and appreciation. If athlete A gets \$1000 for winning ski race X, it would be unfair if athlete B would only get \$500 for accomplishing the same. Obviously this principle is often broken because it is difficult to determine achievements and because other factors such as stardom, character or negotiation skills can play an important role for income, social status and also appreciation. This is especially the case in team sports in which players have to negotiate their salary rather than earning it through prize moneys, as is the case in some individual sports such as tennis. Still, from the perspective of social justice the allocation of money, social status and appreciation through desert should also be fair. Equal pay for equal work should also be a cornerstone within professional sports.

The second argument is non-relational and has to show a distinct and clear connection between the goods deserved and the desert basis. Any answer to this question has to look at the different addressees of social esteem. While it is common and legitimate to claim money for one's work from one's employer it would be absurd to claim that money from a stranger on the street, who has nothing to do with one's work. The institutional setting is the key here, because it determines and secures these connections between what is deserved and for what it is deserved. However these institutional settings are – as I have already mentioned – always changing and they are themselves objects of normative reasoning and should be just. So, it is not enough to simply state that an athlete deserves \$1000 for winning a ski race because the organizers or sponsors of this race are willing to give that \$1000. One has to search for a deeper justification. My sketch of an answer is threefold.

First, professional athletes whose contribution does generate revenue, whether it be through ticket sales, merchandising or TV contracts, deserve their fair share of this revenue. In this case professional athletes are on the one hand comparable to regular workers as they are producers of these products, on the other hand it can be argued that the athletes themselves are the products, which further strengthens these claims. However, athletes can also generate revenue or significant benefits for their employers or institutions that fund them through other channels. For example, they can make their colleges and universities attractive and visible to a broader public, they can

bring in private funding or strengthen the local community. Second, there are many activities which are not sufficiently recognised by the market and which produce valuable goods. These public goods such as healthcare, culture or infrastructure have to be provided by the state or agencies subsidised by the state. The question is whether or not a society should subsidise professional sports with public money if there is no private funding, and I think that there are at least some reasons why a society should do that. Sport and also professional sport, it can be argued, are public goods and can have many different valuable functions in a society. They can enrich the lives of the citizens, promote health or motivate people to sporting activities, provide enjoyment, strengthen solidarity and community or help to build local or even national identity. Professional sport can be a medium for inclusion, a chance for minority groups for integration, and one that can generate a mutual understanding of being equal. It can bring together different social classes, religious or ethnic backgrounds. Different societies favour different forms of sports and there is certainly no right for an athlete of a particular sport to get funded by the public, but professional sport as a social institution is worth such public funding. So, if public money is involved it is again justified to ask for a fair distribution of this money and to give a fair share to those who are responsible for making this public good a reality. Athletes deserve social esteem for what they do. Third, even if a particular sport is neither funded privately nor by the public an athlete deserves something for doing his or her sport. He or she does so because he or she is following his or her chosen path and way of living. That may not justify getting money for it but it at least justifies not being humiliated for it either. The choice to participate demands to be respected for what one does and that it is appreciated by others.

Money, social status and appreciation are important goods of social esteem and professional athletes deserve them to varying degrees and from different addressees of these claims. Any athlete deserves appreciation for his or her efforts and achievements from fellow athletes, spectators and his or her employer, whether it be a privately funded club, a public institution or any other institution that funds an athlete. Any athlete also deserves that his social status within the community of athletes is determined by his or her efforts and achievements. It is also justified if an athlete gains a certain status outside his or her community but this does not have to violate the general idea of equal citizenship. Any society should take measures so that a strong mutual understanding of equality is sustained. All citizens, including professional athletes, deserve to be paid according to their efforts and achievements by their employer. If an athlete does his or her sport for a living – as a job – and whatever institution wishes that he or she does this full-time also, then a full-time wage is deserved. It would be unjust – and maybe also not very efficient – if any institution, whether a private club, a public institution or a national

agency, aimed at having professional athletes and not to secure them a decent economic and social status. Athletes that pursue their sport and can not secure a living wage for it deserve the same protection from social welfare as anyone else that is unable to find adequate employment on the free market.

Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to answer the question of what a professional athlete deserves and I have done this in reference to an understanding of social justice as securing and protecting three different modes of recognition. Desert is incorporated within the mode of social esteem, which claims that every member of society deserves social esteem for his or her contributions within a social context of shared goals. Professional sport is such a social context and therefore professional athletes deserve social esteem according to their contributions. The tricky question is then to decide which forms of social esteem are justified on what bases, which means to specify the concept of contribution. I understood contribution in two ways. First, a contribution can be the effort put into a task or in this case into an athletic activity, whether it be training or competition. Second, a contribution can be the actual performance or achievement of an athlete during training or competition. In the context of professional sports the focus lies on achievements during competition and while efforts do deserve social esteem they do to a lesser extent than actual achievements and a competition counts more than training. I have argued that achievement in this sense deserves social esteem despite the fact that no athlete is completely responsible for his or her achievements and even though effort, luck and natural talent cannot be separated.

The forms of social esteem that are deserved by such athletic achievements can vary between different sports, communities and societies and it is not possible to determine their content without reference to the actual social practices in which they take place. However, a few things can nevertheless be said. Athletes do not deserve to be humiliated or disrespected for their achievements even if they fail minimum standards or if someone has no interest in this sport. Athletes then do deserve appreciation from their fellow athletes and from their employers, whereby the employer is the person, organization or institution that pays the athlete, whether in form of a salary, prize money or stipends. Athletes also do deserve a social status within their community according to their achievements but it is not necessarily so that they deserve a certain social status outside their sporting community. Finally, athletes do also deserve income according to their achievements, which means that it is just if one gets a higher income for being more successful. The reasons that justify these claims are based on the idea of fair sharing of the revenue, the recognition of efforts and achievements put into professional

sports that are of value for others – economically or otherwise – and the idea that every full-time job commands a decent pay. This also justifies differences in pay, social status as well as other forms of social esteem.

However, these differences based on desert have to be kept within certain limits. Two of these limitations arise from outside the sphere of sports and apply to all forms of differences in social esteem, while one is specific to this sphere of sport. The first limitation is set by the two other claims of recognition, care and respect, which demand the protection of equal rights and the provision of basic goods and services for all members of society regardless of their merits. The second limitation arises from the idea of a strong social equality and a society that wants to recognise all its members' talents, efforts and achievements. Although there are differences in a socially just society everyone should feel that his or her talents are needed and that he or she can make a valuable contribution. No one's efforts or achievements are worth that much more that this would justify huge inequalities in pay, life chances or other benefits.

The third limitation concerns the sphere of sport itself. From what I have presented so far one can conclude that certain differences between athletes whether within a sport or across different sports are deserved and therefore socially just. It is not unjust that football is a more acknowledged form of sport and it is also not unjust that for this reason more money is involved in football. Both discus throwing and football are legitimate forms of sport and it is an autonomous decision to engage in one or the other whether as a fan or as an athlete. However, and this is decisive, these differences in social esteem that athletes deserve for their respective sport are to be held within limits that are set by the intrinsic values of sport itself. Adrian Walsh and Richard Giulianotti have convincingly warned before of four different types of pathological developments in sport and an overestimation of differences has to do with all of them. They write:

1 The Motivational Pathology: the commodification of sport is pathological when it corrodes the attitudes of those who participate in sport so that they no longer pursue sport as a goal in itself. 2 The Instrumentalist Pathology: 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. 3 The Distributive Pathology: the commodification of sport is pathological when it gives rise to forms of distributive injustice. 4 The Pragmatic Pathology: the commodification of sport is pathological when it undermines the long-term profitability of any sporting activity. (Walsh and Giulianotti 2006: 120)

I support their assumption that these pathologies can arise from the commodification of sport and a radical market-orientation. A desert-based approach to professional sport as I presented here is always in danger of being used to legitimise any of those pathologies or even assume that they are

just. Therefore the differences between athletes, between teams and clubs and between sports have to be embedded within the greater idea of a community of sports, which holds on to the conviction that each sport demands its own skills, its own talents and is of equal worth. Even if a discus thrower can admit that his or her sport is a niche and that football is far more popular, these differences of social esteem should never lead to a state in which a sport is viewed as inferior or the athletes of lesser worth. This has not only to be done on paper or in friendly speeches but mirrored also in the actual distribution of such important goods as social status and money.

At last I want to come back to the case of millionaires in the MLB. Are they deserved under the assumptions I laid out here? Unfortunately I cannot give a fully detailed and satisfying answer here but I want to point to the direction one could follow. I do not doubt that all these professionals play excellently, that they enjoy many fans, are good teammates, work hard with their coaches and make their bosses happy. So, yes, every player in the MLB deserves social esteem, appreciation and a high social status within professional baseball and by those who enjoy it. They also deserve to be paid quite well and to receive their fair share for producing the quality product of professional baseball. In Switzerland there was a discussion about limiting the wages of managers to a ratio of twelve times as much as the lowest paid employee and I think this would also be a good starting point for adjusting MLB player salaries. That would be high enough to express the basic idea behind desert, namely to recognise and reward differences in achievements, it would reflect the importance of baseball and its value, it would also be high enough to secure a decent life for all these MLB players and their families, it would be high enough to secure access to quality education and healthcare, but it would also be in a reasonable relation to the earnings of other, of those who are not so fortunate to be blessed with such a talent, and of those who do 'normal' but nonetheless important work. That would be a sign of social justice but certainly a just society demands more, also in respect to professional sports (Schweiger 2012).

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