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A Fair Shake for the Fair-Weather Fan

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Abstract

After initially pitting partisans against purists, the literature on the ethics of fandom has coalesced around a pluralist position: purists and partisans each have their own merits, and there is no ideal form of fandom. In this literature, however, the fair-weather fan continues to be viewed with dismissal and (sometimes) derision. While some fair-weather fans may earn this contempt, many fair-weather fans, we argue, are not only acceptable, they have important advantages over partisans and purists, and as such are in a better position to navigate some of the moral complexities inherent in modern sports. We develop this argument first by clarifying the nature of the fair-weather fan. We then examine challenges that fans face in many modern sports, first owing to their economic nature and, second, due to the morally tainted status of many of them. We argue that the fair-weather fan meets these challenges in ways that the partisan and purist cannot replicate.

Keywords: fandom, sports fans, partisan, purist, fair-weather fan, loyalty

In analyzing sports fans, Nicholas Dixon (2001) first distinguished *purists* from *partisans*, advocating the *moderate partisan* as the moral ideal. Russell (2012), Mumford (2011, 2012), and Fezell (2013) complicated that analysis. Mumford pointed out that the purist-partisan dichotomy is not as simple as it initially appears: even the most rabid partisans sometimes lapse into a purist perspective (2011, 2012). In a more recent article, Dixon (2016) concedes several of these points, and, following Russell (2012), has moved towards a plausible pluralism: there is no

single morally ideal form of fandom. Different forms have different advantages, different vulnerabilities, and occupy different positions in the ecosystem of sport. Yet in both philosophy journals and sports bars, one kind of fan is almost universally derided: the fair-weather fan.

The critiques come early and often. Dixon (2001, 152) describes the fair-weather fan as engaged in the 'superficial' pursuit of finding a winner to back. Mumford (2011, 10) casts the fair-weather fan as a suspicious character with 'shifting allegiances'. Russell (2012, 27) attributes to fair-weather fans a 'limited understanding' of the games they are watching. We argue that this universal contempt for the fair-weather fan is misguided. Not only do a significant subset of fair-weather fans deserve our respect, they possess several important advantages over partisans and purists.

We begin in §1 by defining fair-weather fandom: a fair-weather fan's support is not grounded by the partisan's devotion to a particular team, nor by the purist's affinity for a particular sport, but by considerations that are in an important sense *external* to sport. On the basis of this conceptual map, the remainder of the paper argues that the fair-weather fan gets certain things right where partisans and purists get them wrong. In §2, we note that many sports teams are for-profit corporations, and argue that the fair-weather fan's lack of partisan devotion means that they can more easily be responsible consumers. Finally, in §3, we point out advantages fair-weather fans have over purists. We consider sports that are themselves morally tainted, and argue that the fair-weather fan's support is morally superior to purists' aesthetic endorsement.

Ultimately, these contentions should be less counterintuitive than they initially appear, for while these conceptual categories can be useful for better understanding fans, they become problematic

if they are taken to imply a rigid ontology (e.g., Sally is a partisan, Tamika is a purist, Samar is a fair-weather fan). Rather, we should begin with the understanding that the vast majority of actual fans are some combination of purist, partisan, and (whether they would admit it to themselves or not) fair-weather fan. Most enjoy watching sports in general and whatever team they call their own in particular, while remaining open to forming new allegiances based upon reasons that are not reducible to a pure love of the game or to partisan team loyalty. A defense of the fair-weather fan is thus a defense of one of the most commonplace features of the experience of sports fandom itself.

We hope it is in that spirit that this paper is read: Our central contention is not that fair-weather fans are, in the final reckoning, better than their counterparts. Instead, we argue that if we actually give the fair-weather fan a fair shake, we will find that they enjoy underappreciated advantages that are sufficient to earn them a respected place in the pantheon of acceptable forms of sports fandom.

1. What is a Fair-Weather Fan?

What distinguishes one type of fan from another is the kind of reason that grounds their support. A *partisan's* support is grounded by a relationship to a particular team. A lifelong supporter of the New York Knicks, for example, will root for the team through thick and thin. To be a partisan is to be loyal to a particular team, in something like the way that we are loyal to friends (Dixon 2001, 149). A *purist's* support is grounded by an affinity for a particular sport. Purists root for a 'good game', where that term implies not merely a competitive match, but one in which the sport itself is played well.¹ To be a purist is to be loyal to a particular sport, like

basketball, rather than to a particular team, like the Knicks (Dixon 2016, 233). A *fair-weather fan*, by contrast, is someone whose support is grounded by reasons that are external to both particular teams and even to the sport itself. In our view, the point of calling a fan 'fair-weather' is to mark the fact that her allegiance is due to a (perhaps fleeting) alignment between a team or a sport and *extra-sport* considerations.

Understood in these terms, it makes sense to think of fair-weather fans as a broad category that includes quite a lot of variety: after all, the extra-sport considerations that ground any particular fair-weather fan's support might be one of any number of many different things. For example, following the fall of apartheid in South Africa, for example, many South Africans supported the Springboks (the newly integrated national rugby team) for the first time, not out of partisan devotion to the team, nor out of love for rugby itself, but because of the team's role in unifying the political community. Nelson Mandela's "One Nation, One Team" drive was no doubt essential to the Springbok's transformation from apartheid-era symbol of oppression to beacon of multi-racial national unity, and so too was the Springboks' success in the 1995 World Cup (Carlin 1995). In other words, the Springboks would likely not have been able to unify their political community without at least some success on the pitch. Similarly, the US Women's Soccer Team's push for wage equality has been enhanced by their success in the 2019 World Cup. Without that spotlight, many wouldn't even know about the team's activism or have a chance to cheer for their continued success. The life-long advocate of wage equality who now finds himself allied with the US Women's Soccer Team and rooting for their success is a fair-weather fan.

There is still more variety among fair-weather fans. Moving away from high-minded commitments to equality, for example, a citizen of Washington D.C. who has never been passionate about baseball and is just existentially tired of political infighting might welcome the chance to cheer *together* with people they wouldn't otherwise be able to meet on common ground. Fans of the Nationals include Mitch McConnell, George Will, José Andrés, and Chuck Todd.² Once again, the team's success and general popularity are important parts of the overall story for becoming a fair-weather fan of the team: the Nationals were a phenomenon to rally around in 2019 because they were recently relocated underdogs on a once-in-a-lifetime winning streak (Welk 2019).

Relatedly, many people, including authors of this article, reliably root for particular teams primarily because it is just plain fun to share the rooting interests of one's significant other. Watching together—with a shared sense of which plays matter and why—is a different experience than privately rooting for one's favorite team or for a good game. Fandom grounded by the desire to have fun with a loved one is fair-weather fandom. But it is not morally problematic and does not deserve the derision that some fair-weather fans have (arguably) earned. This fandom is nonetheless contingent in a way it is not for the partisan or the purist, because it would evaporate if the relationship were to dissolve.

Before closing this section, several clarifications are in order. First, it is important to distinguish fair-weather fans from what might be called *casual fans*. Casual fans are marked by the lower intensity of their support. They might enjoy basketball, but watch the NBA only when the intensity ratchets up in the playoffs (in which case they would probably be a purist), or when

their favored team makes the playoffs (in which case they would probably be a partisan). Casual fans are to be contrasted with fanatics. The casual-fanatic distinction cuts across the partisan/purist/fair-weather divide. Just as a partisan of the New York Knicks might be fanatical or casual, the fair-weather fan who supports the US Women's Soccer Team might watch every game with intense interest or just check the scores and watch highlights online.

Second, we do not mean to suggest that fair-weather fans have a monopoly on moral values. The support of Dixon's moderate partisan, for example, is ultimately grounded by her subjective connection to a particular team, but recognizes ethical side constraints (Dixon 2001, 153). She will abandon her team—or its current instantiation—if it resorts to dirty play, cheap tricks, or outright cheating. But whereas ethical concerns are a *side constraint* for the moderate partisan, ethical values can *ground* the support of a fair-weather fan. For the fair-weather fans in our Springboks and US Women's Soccer team examples, extra-sport values are the ultimate basis of their rooting interests.

Third, one might point out, as Dixon and Mumford have, that partisans can also come to support a team for reasons external to the team, such as where they happen to be born or which teams' games are broadcast in their area (Dixon 2001, 150; Mumford 2004, 185). One might then wonder how distinct fair-weather fans truly are.³ This kind of example usefully illustrates how a fan can shift between different types. Here, the fan may begin as fair-weather, but once she develops loyalty to the team, she becomes a partisan. To further emphasize the difference, consider that some fans remain fair-weather for the entirety of their fandom. They will stop supporting a team as soon as it no longer serves their external reasons, as in the example of a person who stops supporting a team once he breaks up with his significant other.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, some will likely worry that we have cast the net too wide in our characterization of fair-weather fans. Such people, be they sports theorists or sports fans, might initially believe that fair-weather fans are only those with a desire to be bandwagoners, a term whose etymology demonstrates that popularity and popularity alone is the motivating reason to become interested in a particular team or a particular sport. Some will likely initially believe that all fair-weather fans are merely yearning to be near something popular, much like those crowding around the Mona Lisa for a selfie with no regard for the merits of the actual painting itself.

However, we believe that this worry and the assumption that underlies it is misguided for two important reasons. First, it runs the risk of begging the question. On this assumption, *no* fair-weather fan can be morally acceptable because fair-weather fans are *by definition* reproachable *qua* fan. Even more importantly, it assumes a motivation for the fair-weather fan that is uncharitable. It's a mistake to assume that any fan whose rooting interest *depends* upon a team's success must be rooting for a team *merely because* of that success. Fair-weather fans, like fans generally, are a mixed lot. Nothing bars advocates of wage equality from understanding and appreciating the game of soccer. Fair-weather fans can appreciate and even be passionate about a given team, a given game, a given season, a given rivalry, or a given event. When fans are drawn to a team for the first time (or the first time in a while) it is often not merely because they are excited about a team's success but also because of the way that success works to strengthen communal bonds. These are fair-weather fans in any plausible pre-theoretic conception of the term, and we believe they too merit a place in the big tent of acceptable sports fandom. After all, if one of the things we find laudable about sports, if one of the reasons sports are even sometimes

given public financing, is their ability to bring communities together, then it would seem hypocritical and problematic to allow some subset of ‘true’ fans to act as a kind of moral gatekeepers.

The examples in this section, we think, show that fair-weather fans do not deserve categorical dismissal. There is nothing intrinsically problematic with supporting teams because they take a moral stand, with adopting a loved one’s team simply because that’s an important way of forging a friendship, or with using one’s fandom as a way to bring a community together. Such fans ought to be (with perhaps a very few exceptions) welcomed as morally acceptable—even sometimes morally laudable. In the remainder of this paper we go a step further, arguing that fair-weather fans have important advantages over partisans and purists, and as such are in a better position to navigate some of the moral complexities inherent in modern sports.

2. Fair-Weather Fans and Partisans: Responsible Consumerism and the Business of Sports

A fair-weather fan is less firmly tethered to their favorite team than a partisan. However, this pliability will often constitute a salutary flexibility rather than a suspicious lack of commitment. For better and worse, many sports teams are for-profit corporate entities. In this section, we make related arguments that (a) fair-weather fans are less vulnerable to corporate exploitation than partisans, and that (b) unburdened by partisan devotion, fair-weather fans have more flexibility to be morally responsible consumers of sport.

Dixon (2001) models partisan fandom on romantic love. He approvingly cites Blum (1980, 57), who writes that devotion to a romantic partner is ‘morally good in that it involves (among other

things) an admirable degree of sympathy, compassion, and concern for others'. So long as the partisan's commitment doesn't incorporate a morally deficient stance towards third parties—as long as it doesn't devolve into rank tribalism—Dixon thinks it good for the same reasons that romantic love is good. This account of partisanship's value is plausible: sympathy, compassion, and concern are *prima facie* goods.

But there are two important disanalogies between partisanship in sports and romantic love—one that Dixon recognizes and one that he overlooks. The disanalogy he recognizes is that whereas romantic love is ideally reciprocal, the partisan's devotion to their team is not. Our romantic partners are supposed to return our devotion in kind. Sports teams appreciate their fans, but, as Dixon (2016, 237) aptly puts it, 'they are not fans of their fans'. The second disanalogy, the one Dixon overlooks, is that whatever else they are, many professional teams and many professional leagues are for-profit corporations. They have owners and employees. They sell a performance that fans, who are simultaneously consumers, pay to take in. They partner with sponsors and sell advertisements. Making money is one of their central aims.⁴ Revenue-generating collegiate sports in the US are built on much the same model.

Of course, any commitment—including, or perhaps especially, romantic love—comes bundled with risk. But, in the case of romantic love, reciprocity mitigates that risk. We are vulnerable to our lovers; but our lovers' reciprocal commitment to us, combined with the fact that their motives are not primarily financial, means that getting played for a fool is a hazard but far from inevitable. Partisan fans, by contrast, are in a one-sided relationship with an entity that generally cares more about the bottom line than it does about them. In fact, the situation is worse: rarely do

sports teams care about *you* as an individual; they care about having fans *in general*, but they almost never care about individual fans by name.

A devotion modeled on romantic love seems like a risky attitude to bear towards a profit-driven corporation. The risks are real and not merely imagined: there is a robust industry—complete with its own peer-reviewed journals—dedicated to cultivating partisan fandom for profit.⁵

Partisans can, of course, develop an appropriate caution alongside their love-like devotion. But the point is that relative to the fair-weather fan, partisans have an increased need of appropriate caution and will generally be at greater risk of getting things wrong. Some partisans will manage to strike an admirable balance of love and caution towards their favorite teams; but, realistically, many will fail and be exploited by cynical corporations. If we are at all realistic about corporate ambition for profit, and at all realistic about the blind spots partisan devotion can create, this conclusion seems inescapable.

Dixon's endorsement of a *moderate* partisan position might be thought to head off this sort of danger. But moderation cannot eliminate the danger entirely. If the loyalty of the partisan is to amount to anything, it must mean that they will stand by their team even when they do not have independent reasons for doing so, even when better reasons for doing something else are available. This is just what it means to have 'tenacity' in Dixon's sense (2001, 153; 2016, 237). Moreover, if one is a partisan of a team, one's very assessment of the team and its actions will necessarily be colored by one's loyalty. Indeed, Simon Keller (2007) includes 'taking something's side' in his definition of what it means to have loyalty (21).⁶ Similarly, Mumford (2011) argues that being a partisan alters how one perceives a game. These are both examples of

a more general phenomenon: because reasoning is often systematically deployed to defend prior moral commitments, the moderate partisan is more likely to rationalize past commitments that have become problematic, while the fair-weather fan has a better chance to see them for what they are (cf. Haidt 2001). In short, the partisan's vulnerability, whether she is fanatical or moderate or casual, cannot be wholly swept away without also erasing her defining feature—a degree of loyalty grounded by a subjective connection to her team.

In contrast, fair-weather fans (and purists) are better positioned to be responsible consumers. Brand loyalty to a lousy business is a vice for consumers, and partisans conspicuously don't apportion their support according to the quality of the on-field product in the way purists might. Being a partisan of, say, the New York Knicks is a bit like supporting Blockbuster Video—chronically hapless management has led to a bad and expensive product; the responsible consumer will (and did) jump ship. Fair-weather fans are one step ahead of purists on this score, and are thus two steps ahead of partisans. Like purists, fair-weather fans can jump ship when their favorite team is no longer providing an adequate on-field product. But the fair-weather fan can also support a team for a wider array of reasons, including the kinds of social justice reasons that so often motivate responsible consumers. Fair-weather fans can support a team because it signed Colin Kaepernick, because it evinces solidarity with groups in need (such as veterans or victims of recent violence), or because it supports gay or lesbian players—even if that team's play would not earn the purist's admiration on its own.

To his credit, Dixon (2016) does address the economic side of sports. He claims that partisan fans are indispensable to the economic functioning of sport (246). We are skeptical of this claim:

scores of businesses operate—even thrive—without inducing in their customer base a non-reciprocal loyalty. And even if a sports league could not thrive without non-reciprocal loyalty, it would be a mistake to conflate a sport with the most popular currently existing league. Hordes of partisan fans may be indispensable to the current functioning of the NFL, but this does not mean it is indispensable for the sport of American football. Perhaps the current economic model of the NFL is actually not something worth defending—it could, over time, even become something at odds with the persistence of the sport of football.

So: the fair-weather fan lacks the commitment and the loyalty of the partisan. That much is certainly true. But a great many of the world's most beloved sports teams are for-profit corporations. The flexibility of the fair-weather fan—who by definition can support a team for reasons ranging from on-field product to its stance on broader social policies—allows for responsible consumership in a way that the partisan cannot match.

Although this section focuses mostly on economic issues, it's worth briefly noting that the vulnerability point extends more broadly. A partisan's loyalty also makes them vulnerable to complicity with a team's misdeeds and to harboring ill-will toward its rivals. Since the complicity point bears some similarities to our discussion of morally tainted sports in the next section, we will only address the issue of ill-will here. Dixon (2016) characterizes the moderate partisan as someone 'whose zealous support for an athlete or team is untainted by any antipathy toward rivals' (241). The roots of this aspiration are in the analogy Dixon (2001) draws between romantic love and partisan fandom: loving one person needn't entail hating or disrespecting strangers (154). As a matter of pure logic, Dixon is correct that love for one needn't entail

negative attitudes towards another. But if we accept Dixon's analogy to love, for a moment, the question becomes more complicated. How are we likely to feel about people who stand in a contentious relation to a loved one? More bluntly, how are we likely to feel about someone our beloved hates? Love is an especially intense allegiance. As an empirical matter, the idea that it will never 'spill over' into the way we view our beloved's rivals is implausible. In the sports context, for example, even the most watered-down, heavily moderated partisans of the Boston Red Sox are likely to feel satisfaction when the New York Yankees struggle. So Dixon is correct that love for one person doesn't *logically* entail disrespect towards another; but human psychology means that partisans are prone to this excess nonetheless. If ill will towards sporting rivals is a moral stain, it is hard to believe that partisans would ever be completely free of it. Fair-weather fans—who are free of the partisan's loyal devotion—needn't suffer the same fate.

While a partisan's commitment to a team can provide opportunities for the development of certain moral virtues, such as grace in defeat, graciousness in victory, and patience (Dixon 2016, 241), the preceding discussion shows that fair-weather fans are better able to realize two other morally important qualities: the ability to be responsible consumers and reduced vulnerability, both to corporate exploitation and to inappropriate feelings of ill-will.

3. Fair-Weather Fans and Purists: Morally Tainted Sports

The advantages of fair-weather fans go beyond comparisons with partisans. As we argue in this section, fair-weather fans also enjoy two significant advantages over purists with respect to what is emerging as a growing set of morally tainted sports. First, fair-weather fans are not in the ethically precarious situation of loving a morally tainted sport for its own sake. Second, fair-

weather fandom allows for a greater openness to abandoning sports when moral reasons require it.

While Dixon (2016, 246) begins with the assumption that sports are *generally* good, it shouldn't be controversial to point out that *some* sports are rotten to their very core. It would be problematic enough to be a partisan supporter of a particular fighting dog; but it would be even worse to be a dog-fighting purist. Loving such a cruel and bloody spectacle for its own sake is a pronounced moral failure.

Dog fighting is an extreme example, but it sets up an important point about sports that are *morally tainted* rather than wholly evil. Given the current state of medical knowledge, NFL football is perhaps the paradigm case (cf. Tyler 2021). We assume that it is still permissible, all things considered, to be a fan of football—the sport features dazzling athleticism, compelling gameplay, fascinating tactics, and could be run in a way that both reduces the risk of brain damage (relative to current levels) and responsibly informs players about the very real health risks they face. But despite this portfolio of goods, football is not free from serious moral concerns. Risk of brain trauma is part and parcel of the sport.

Purist football fans might initially object that their love of the game doesn't extend to brain trauma; they're in it for the tactics and compelling gameplay. But this response misses the point. Purist *football* fans do not love tactics and gameplay *simpliciter*. They love tactics and gameplay *as instantiated by modern football*. They love creative blocking schemes, hard runs up the middle, and open-field tackles. These activities—by their very nature—often lead to brain

damage. If we excised all the parts of the sport that predictably cause neurological injuries, the leftovers would not be a watered-down version of football; they wouldn't constitute football at all.

That raises a problem for the purist fan of any morally tainted sport or league. To love football itself is, in a sense, to find joy in activities that do not merely risk long-term damage to knees and ankles, but are likely to significantly damage players' brains (Belson 2019). That description might sound harsh, but it is the unvarnished truth: the physical features that constitute, say, a good block are often the very same ones that constitute a neurologically injurious collision. If it is morally impermissible to be a purist fan of dogfighting, it is *morally precarious* to be a purist fan of modern football. Fair-weather fans can avoid this hazard. Taking an interest in football because one's partner is a lifelong fan is different from—and arguably better than—finding joy in creative blocking schemes, hard runs up the middle, or open-field tackles. Rather than loving the injurious spectacle for its own sake, the fair-weather fan's support can be grounded their interest in maintaining and enhancing their relationship.

NCAA Basketball offers another example of a sport that is very likely morally tainted. In contrast to the NFL, the (arguably) most salient moral flaw of NCAA basketball resides not in the sport itself, but in the infrastructure that surrounds it. A basketball purist may well be drawn to the way the game is played by the best collegiate teams. NCAA rules, as compared to NBA rules, allow for different creativity in the kinds of defenses that can be played, with presses (for example) used as more than mere last-minute attempts for a miracle come-back. An emphasis on

team passing and taking charges, both aspects a purist might find admirable, are more often seen at the college level than in the NBA.

But one could nonetheless worry that the NCAA policies are exploitative of those that play the game: NCAA Basketball players (often not from wealthy families, and often people of color) are not compensated beyond receiving free tuition, room and board – despite the fact that at many universities their efforts directly lead to millions of dollars for coaches, athletic directors and staff, and the universities themselves. NCAA basketball, like the NFL, might not be so corrupted that fandom is impermissible, all things considered; but it too is at the very least morally tainted in a way that makes purist fandom morally precarious.

Eventually some sports, while not wholly evil, could become so morally tainted that the only appropriate course of action would be to walk away. Suppose that new medical evidence elevates moral concerns about American football beyond the breaking point. So long as purists have loyalty to the sport itself—so long as they are purists, that is—it will be difficult for them to walk away *even when they should*. Just as we cannot sweep away partisans' vulnerability to corporations without erasing their defining feature (i.e., loyalty to team), we cannot sweep away the purists' struggle to abandon their favorite sport without erasing their defining feature (i.e., loyalty to sport). Loyalty can be fanatical or moderate or casual; but it by definition involves a steadfastness that outstrips our independent moral reasons. And that is the second advantage fair-weather fans have over purists: they are less likely to stay involved past the point of permissibility. Fair-weather fans—precisely because their support is contingent—are more likely to move on from the NFL if it becomes morally necessary to do so.

Moreover, fair-weather fans also possess distinctive positive reasons to support certain sports and certain leagues, leagues like the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, a sports organization at the forefront of LBGTQ inclusion and empowering traditionally oppressed groups. Unlike the purist, the fair-weather fan's reasons to support the league are *strengthened* by the fact that the league intentionally makes changes to its rule set in order to better meet the needs of its athletes and to reinforce its robustly grass-roots and collective governance, rather than to better highlight the athletic and aesthetic virtues of the sport itself.

It is true that purists might be motivated to see their sports improve in moral terms, and they might furthermore be uniquely positioned to work to make a sport better from the inside.

Appropriate loyalty, whether it be to a person, a community, or a collective, does not require you to simply accept all the shortcomings of your friends, communities, or sports. Loyalty may spur or even require you to work with your friends and your community to help make them better.

Loyalty also does not require that you stick with your friends, community, or sport come what may. There can be a moral line beyond which a purist would walk away from a sport. Yet, like the loyalty of the partisan, if the loyalty of the purist is to amount to anything, it must mean that they will stand by their sport, even when they do not have independent reasons for doing so, even when better reasons for doing something other than standing by their sport are available.

By contrast, fair-weather fans have the ability to make a sport better from the outside, through criticism, and even through vacating their fandom. Purists must necessarily be incrementalists in their pursuit to improve the sports they love. Fair-weather fans can be incrementalists, but they

also have an enhanced ability to walk away from problematic sports and towards morally better options, engendering a kind of creative destruction. If, for example, further evidence of CTE's impact heightens the problems with supporting the NFL, fair-weather fans can more readily move on to rugby, Australian rules football, or flag football. Furthermore, any fan-initiated effort to reform sports will entail some thorny collective action problems that will only be overcome with sufficient and sustained interest from a critical mass of fans (Tyler 2021). A healthy population of fair-weather fans among the crowds might well help spark and sustain the pressure, whereas coalitions of partisans and purists only might more readily succumb without achieving desired results.

In this section, we argued that fair-weather fans have certain advantages over purists. They have a greater ability to walk away when a sport becomes corrupted, and they possess distinctive positive reasons to support certain sports and certain leagues. These advantages allow them to make sports better than they otherwise would be, and provide a final reason to grant fair-weather fans a place in the plurality of commendable forms of sports fandom.

4. Conclusion

We hope to have demonstrated that the fair-weather fan's lack of loyalty can, at times, be a significant advantage rather than a shortcoming. Fair-weather fans are less vulnerable to corporate exploitation than the partisan, less vulnerable to the moral pitfalls of morally tainted sports than the purist, and need not be the shallow bandwagoners that rightly earn ridicule. The partisan's and purist's loyalty will lead some to take their fandom farther than they ought.

As noted at the outset, we would be well served to remember that the vast majority of actual fans

are some combination of purist, partisan, and fair-weather fan. So, even if all of our analysis is correct, that should not be read as a wholesale condemnation of partisans or purists—for almost any sports fan will no doubt continue to find themselves in one or both of those categories at some point in the future. Rather, these arguments ought to serve as an indication that the type of fan we should often strive to be more like is precisely the kind of fan we are pre-reflectively likely to dismiss out of hand: the fair-weather fan.

Notes

¹ A purist might develop a rooting interest in a particular team out of a sense that the team plays the game more artfully than its rivals do.

² Also, many fans of used bookstores wound up rooting for the team because of a relief pitcher's social media posts about how important such places can be for a community (Diamond 2019).

³ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

⁴ There are occasional exceptions. Sometimes, a lavishly rich ownership runs a team at an acceptable financial loss in order to compete for a championship or bolster their public image (e.g., 'sportswashing'). Other times, ownership will temporarily swallow a bloated payroll to make the most of a generational talent's prime. But even in these cases, there are economic reasons that speak in favor of short-term financial losses: the possibility of television contracts, sponsorships, and fan devotion that will pay future dividends.

⁵ For example, one study tells teams how to create fans that 'display a high degree of behavioral loyalty through their regular participation in the team's events and other activities and purchases of the team's licensed products' (Karjaluoto, Mannukka, and Salmi 2015, 54). Another study recommends investment strategies to produce 'long-term effects, such as trust in the team and team identification' (Wu, Tsai, and Hung 2012, 177) so that fan loyalty will survive the comings and goings of individual players.

⁶ For a similar point about having 'faith in someone', see Preston-Roedder 2013.

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