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Politics is an Olympian endeavor

By E.J. DIONNE JR.

Simone Manuel, Katie Ledecky and Simone Biles will not be eligible to run for president until 2032, although Michael Phelps hits 35 years old in 2020. After watching these Olympians display so many traits we admire—persistence, discipline, grace, goal orientation, resilience, and inner strength—perhaps we should consider drafting one of them some day.

e.j. dionne

Defense of Politics, democratic politics is “a great and civilizing human activity” because it’s the way in which we seek to resolve our disputes without resorting to violence. “Politics has rough manners,” he wrote, “but it is a very useful thing.”

In sports, the goals are clear. In politics, much less so—partly because, as the philosopher Isaiah Berlin taught us, there are competing goods in life that are often irreconcilable. Your notion of liberty may be perfectly reasonable but it may well conflict in profound ways with my equally reasonable ideas about equality. We can even disagree on the nature of commitments we claim to share. “We all declare for liberty,” Abraham Lincoln said, “but in using the same word, we do not all mean the same thing.”

As for Deford’s example of a war, we can disagree not only on the tactics required to win it but also on whether it should be waged in the first place.

The 2016 campaign is one of the least uplifting examples of politics in our lifetimes. I place most of the blame for this on Donald Trump, although examples of campaigns that were universally regarded as uplifting are rare. Trump’s rise itself reflects a deep cynicism about politics that we have allowed to fester. He praises himself for not being a “politician,” even though that is exactly what he is. In his manipulation of resentments and his indifference to truth, he represents the worst traits we associate with the breed.

But Trump is, finally, a symptom of our impatience with and disrespect for the messy but essential work that politicians do -- and the fact that we are badly out of practice when it comes to reconciling (as opposed to sharpening) our differences.

I truly hope that our great Olympians consider joining the political fray down the road. But in the short run, we citizens and our leaders need to work as hard at the skills of self-rule as they do at their strokes, kicks, floor routines and overall fitness. We admire them for respecting the integrity of what they do. We need the same attitude toward politics.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

It is both a blessing and a curse that the Summer Olympics happen during the election year. The blessings are obvious. Especially in this campaign, it is a relief to watch a display of American talent that truly brings the country together. It’s a nice change of pace to see participants judged by objective standards (with all the caveats that gymnastics scoring invites). It is good to see these men and women achieve because they absolutely earned it.

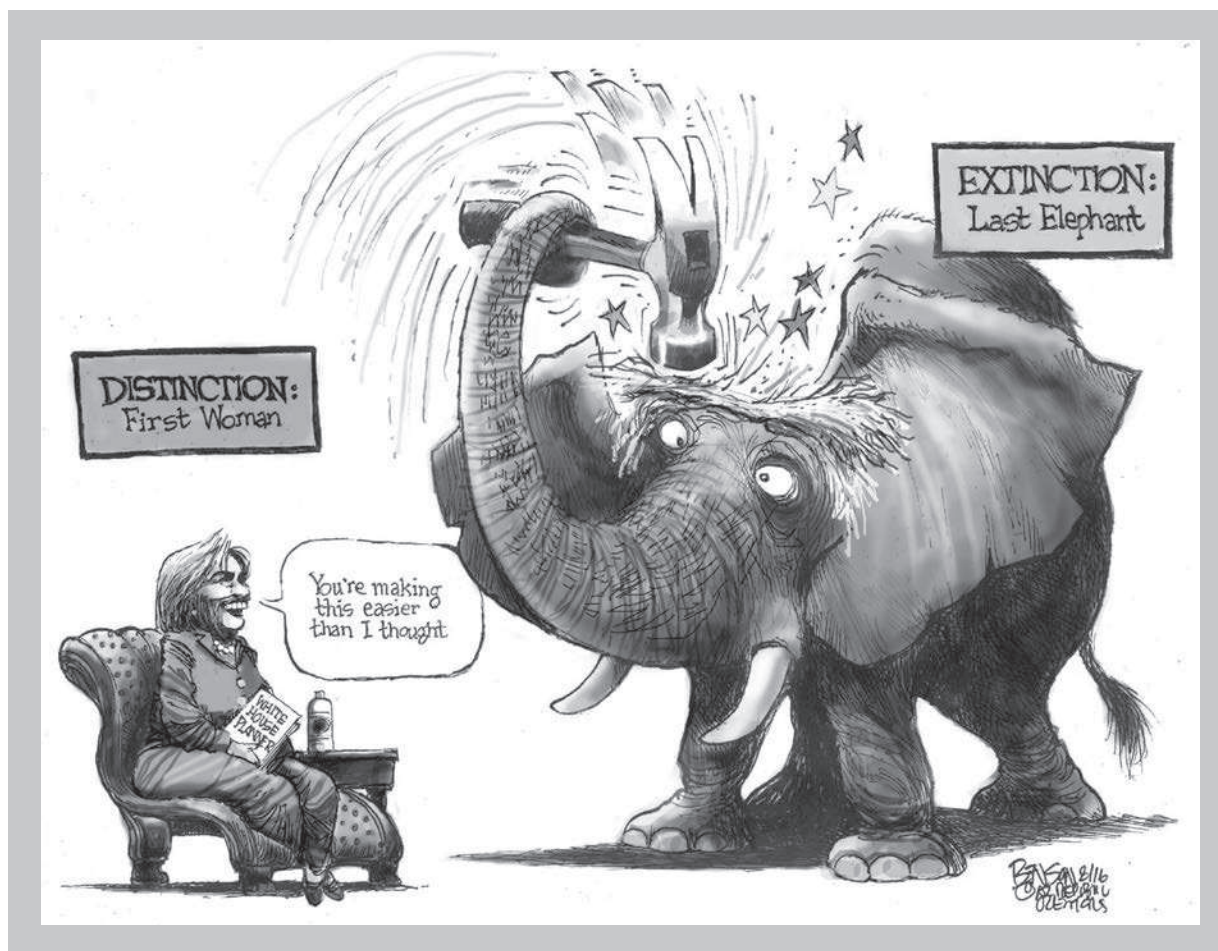
And during a campaign in which one of the issues is whether the United States has lost its “greatness,” a glance at the Olympic medal board suggests otherwise while a look at the members of Team USA suggests how our diversity is part of our strength.

There is, finally, a lesson for political commentators in watching our sports colleagues do their work. I’ll always treasure a 2004 NPR essay by the legendary sports writer Frank Deford pushing back against the idea that political writing is too much like sports writing in focusing on the “horse race.”

Beyond pointing out that our never-ending election seasons more resemble pennant chases than horse races (which “last about a minute and half”), Deford argued that sports journalists are typically more straightforward in assessing the good and the bad in their realm. There’s no pressure for false balance, and he sees sports journalists as better than we political scribes at “probing, questioning authority, not being afraid to criticize.”

But Deford also suggested why the straightforward joys of sports we’re currently celebrating can actually blind us to the nobility, or at least the extreme difficulty, of politics. He admitted that “it’s a great deal easier to shoot your mouth off about whether the coach called the right plays in the fourth quarter than about how to conduct a war.”

No kidding. Politics is fundamentally different from other spheres because it is about reconciling sharply differing interests and people with fundamentally different goals and worldviews. As Bernard Crick argued in his classic book *In*



Will drama win the debates?

By DEBRA J. SAUNDERS

The first of three presidential debates won’t happen until Sept. 26. Nearly six weeks beforehand, I safely can make these predictions: Hillary Clinton will show up for all three, as her campaign announced this week. Donald Trump will show up, at least to most of them. He told *Time*, “I will absolutely do three debates”—although he noted he has “to see the conditions.” Most important, after each debate, the media will spend the next 24 to 48 hours debating what Trump really meant by his latest bizarre utterance and if that particular off-the-wall remark represents the last straw, sinking his campaign.

Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta rightly ribbed Trump for engaging “in shenanigans around these debates. It is not clear if he is trying to avoid debates, or merely toying with the press to create more drama.” In July, The Donald tweeted, “As usual, Hillary & the Dems are trying to rig the debates so 2 are up against major NFL games. Same as last time w/ Bernie. Unacceptable!” Not that he minded, but he made himself look silly. The bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates had chosen the

other views

dates before Clinton won the nod and the NFL announced its schedule. Trump also claimed that the NFL

complained to him in a letter—which the NFL denied.

Trump also says that he wants “fair” moderators. Be it noted, when Trump talks about fairness, he means favorable to him. Yet in this ugly election season, it’s voters who should wonder if the debate schedule is fair to the electorate. The RealClearPolitics polling average shows that 61 percent of voters have an unfavorable opinion of Trump, while 53 percent have an unfavorable opinion of Clinton. A majority of voters don’t like either candidate. Is it fair that Americans could be stuck watching a face-off between two highly unlikables?

There is hope. The debate commission will look at the polls after Labor Day to see if a third-party candidate has hit 15 percent support in five unnamed national polls. Libertarian nominee Gary Johnson has exceeded 10 percent in

two polls this month—more than twice the showing of Green Party nominee Jill Stein. Commission co-chair Frank Fahrenkopf recently told *CNBC* the panel would “consider giving an inch” to an outsider—if, for example, a candidate hit an average of 14.5 in polls with a margin of error in the 3 percent range. *Politico* reported that the panel told sponsors to prepare for the possibility there will be a third lecturer. That is the best presidential campaign news I’ve heard all year.

You will hear calls for the panel to ditch its participation criteria and admit Johnson and Stein. But, as Pace University political science professor David Caputo told me, small tweaks are OK, but if the commission dumps its rules to accommodate a low-polling Johnson, “I think it would be very difficult” to say no to Trump’s demands for, say, time slots that are likely to draw top ratings or “fair” moderators.

Meanwhile, if you want Johnson on the stage with Clinton and Trump, stay by your phone. You never know when a pollster might call.

(Creators Syndicate)

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Earning millions while others suffer

Review the particulars of just one Oregon professional team of sixteen players, the Portland Trail Blazers. They will take part in 82 games during regular season play between October and sometime in April, or about a half year’s work time, unless they win enough games to enter the playoffs, which end in 2017 with an NBA championship, a status the Trail Blazers have not achieved since 1977. Nevertheless, during the next four years of playing a game for profit, those 16 Blazers will take home, in contractual salaries, about \$550,000,000.

But do these and other professional athletes deserve that kind of money? One opinion, mine, believes the answer is in the negative. Here’s why: In the U.S. of former times, salaries and wages were based on the value of one’s work. If we were still that nation nowadays, grounded in reasonableness, all members of this society would be paid according to the economic importance and value to society of their job.

Consider the profession of being a school teacher. Although we Americans argue about everything, it would seem we can agree that one of the most important occupations here is teaching. Why? Because our very future depends on the education of our youth. Yet, many American teachers are paid less than two current examples among thousands of those possible: the amount of money Cleveland Cavaliers’ LeBron James or Golden State Warriors’ Stephen Curry. For each basket they make, they receive pay equal to the annual salary of many an American public and private school teacher.

Then there’s the president of the United States, who a lot of us feel is the most important American citizen. The president makes decisions every day that affect the entire world but earns a comparably paltry (to most professional athletes) \$400,000 per year.

gene h. mcintyre

Meanwhile, the nation’s governors are paid as low as Maine’s at \$73,000 and as high as Pennsylvania’s at \$187,256; Oregon’s gov-

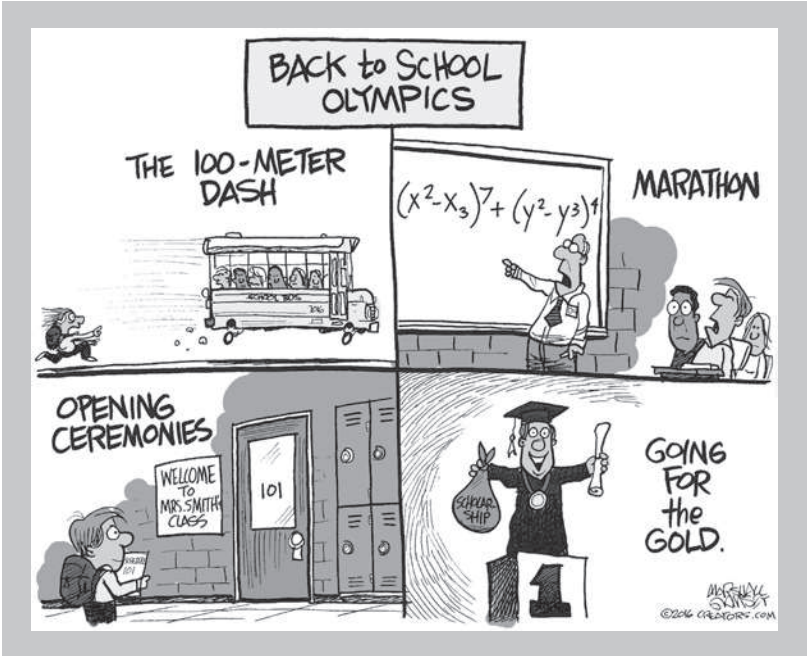
ernor is currently paid \$93,600 per year. Even unproven and possible early washouts during their first year in the NBA (and other professional sports like the Major League Baseball and National Football League) receive more money than the president and every U.S. governor.

Firefighters and police officers risk their lives for a mere fraction of sports stars’ salaries. American military personnel leave their families for assignments overseas in war-torn lands and sometimes never return. Those lost in battle are briefly recognized for their sacrifice. Meanwhile, Blazer players like Damien Lillard and C.J. McCollum are considered heroes and paid in one year for playing a game what many an American may earn in an entire lifetime. Meanwhile, some of those Americans die, protecting and serving us.

The Trail Blazers have had some very poorly self-disciplined players on board. These men have shown those who look up to them that a person can succeed at making big money and remain in hero status to youth even though they are lousy citizens. Lately, if Blazers are behaving badly we know little or nothing about their escapades by way of cagey spokespersons.

It quite honestly grieves me to be aware that there are so many social problems in Portland and throughout Oregon that money could help to relieve as, for just one example, providing shelter and food for those many who don’t want to live homeless. If Oregon’s citizens would boycott professional games until salaries were reduced to reasonable levels, we could do so much better than we do now at addressing our multiple social ills. As long as thousands of us are willing to spend hundreds of dollars to watch a few gifted athletes play ball while starving kids in wet clothes, without a place to stay overnight, cry outside in an old car that’s their home, we can never claim any longer to be a moral society.

(Gene H. McIntyre’s column appears weekly in the *Keizertimes*.)



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Wheatland Publishing Corp. • 142 Chemawa Road N. • Keizer, Oregon 97303
phone: 503.390.1051 • web: www.keizertimes.com • email: kt@keizertimes.com



NEWS EDITOR
Eric A. Howald
editor@keizertimes.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Derek Wiley
news@keizertimes.com

ADVERTISING
Paula Moseley
advertising@keizertimes.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Andrew Jackson
graphics@keizertimes.com

LEGAL NOTICES
legals@keizertimes.com

BUSINESS MANAGER
Laurie Painter
billing@keizertimes.com

RECEPTION
Lori Beyeler

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