

Warning: “Mutant Sports”! Power Slap as a Case Study

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Abstract

This article discusses a new version of body culture: Physical activities disguising themselves in an attempt to be counted as legitimate sports. Slap fighting stands at the core of this discussion and serves as a case study for a trend which the authors warn is cause for concern. The article shows how slap fighting undermines the entire value system upon which modern sport is founded. Although it has theoretically adopted the sporting standards implicit in the concept of fair play, slap fighting is empty of the essential components that define sport, the values common to humanity as a whole, replacing them with humiliation and gloating as the ultimate goal and climax of the event. From the outset, slap fighting was designed for social media, especially TikTok, a platform that aims to provide viewers with a quick thrill. We call slap fighting (and similar practices) “bottom-line sport” because it contains no genuine athletic competition apart from the humiliating outcome, which is also the entirety of the event.

Keywords

Power Slap, Gloating, Commercialization of Sports, TikTok, Sport Heroes

1. Introduction

Two men stand face to face, their eyes locked in a threatening glare. One extends his hand to the cheek of the other and takes aim, preparing to slap him forcefully. After performing two such practice motions to establish the exact trajectory of the slap, he draws back his hand to gather momentum and slaps his rival's cheek with an out-stretched arm. The opponent does not defend himself from the assault. He stands motionless, ready and willing to receive the slap, hands clasped behind his back, holding a rod. The slap lands on his cheek. A slow-motion close-up shows

his face being crushed and distorted as he loses consciousness and collapses, much to the crowd's delight¹. This scene was lifted not from a fictional horror movie, but from a video put out by Power Slap, the company promoting the show to gain traction in Eastern Europe and the United States.

We would have dismissed fight slapping as yet another masochistic freak show and it would not have commanded our attention were its creators not attempting to couch it as an actual sport. In the current study, we examine this ritual with one main objective in mind: To expose fake "sports" in their attempts to gain a stamp of legitimacy, and to raise the alarm lest they change our whole way of thinking about sport. Slap fighting will serve as a case study for such an attempt.

This article is not the first to warn against new "mutant sports", as we call them in this article, that threaten to decouple physical endeavor from the values we ascribe to it; or put simply, to empty sport of its morals. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev warned about the perversion of sports education (Gur-Ze'ev, 2007). According to Gur-Ze'ev, the barbaric management accompanying the competitive sports industry generates an erotic that supplants the spiritual dimensions of the consumers. Post-modern sports culture led him to revisit the fundamental questions that lie at the foundation of body culture: What is the essential purpose of sport? What are the mechanisms that cause this essential purpose to be forgotten? What is the link between sport and moral education? And finally, what is sporting success in an age where ratings and commercialization have become the ultimate benchmark? Since the publication of Gur-Ze'ev's article (Gur-Ze'ev, 2007), the three-way relationship between sports, media, and the consumer economy has only grown stronger; in plain terms, sport is becoming a reality show. These questions, therefore, not only remain relevant, but they are becoming more acute in view of the violent practices battering at the gates of legitimate sport.

In this normative-conceptual analysis article we describe Power Slap and the slap fighting it promotes; present the different criteria used to define physical activities as sports; investigate whether slap fighting meets these formal criteria and whether it embodies the values represented by modern sport; and expose the mechanisms of camouflage slap fighting utilizes in its attempt to be included in the definition of sport. By analyzing secondary literature and online spaces where the ritual is documented, this study aims to define the practice, and position it within the diverse field of physical activity.

2. A Short Lesson in Slapping

Slap fighting appears to have first emerged in Russia and several countries in Eastern Europe. The rules of competition are extremely simple. Two opponents stand face to face and take turns hitting each other on the cheek with an open palm, typically until one of them is unable to recover within sixty seconds. If both contestants remain standing after ten rounds, the judges declare the winner based on

¹See, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/trU6LkNKc-4>.

his/her ability to withstand the slaps and the extent of the damage inflicted on their opponent. The slap must land on the cheek, and it is forbidden to slap below the chin. The striker must declare the number of practice motions they will perform in advance, before administering the slap itself (a maximum of two such motions is allowed). The “striker” must stand on both feet while administering the slap and the “defender” must stand directly opposite, holding a baton with hands clasped behind the back. Contestants who duck, flinch, or make any movement with their body or head to soften the blow are penalized (Washburn, 2023). There are two “catchers” who stand beside the contestants and prevent their heads from colliding with the table in front of them. The contestants, who must be at least 18 years old, are divided according to the same weight categories used in mixed martial arts (MMA): super heavyweight, heavyweight, light heavyweight, middle-weight, and welterweight (Power Slap, n.d.).

The history of slap fighting is extremely brief. It started out as a small, bizarre show unsponsored by any official institution; however, in the early 2020s it began amassing fans and spreading around the world. Slap fighting competitions are currently considered the fastest-rising events in the United States (Dziak, 2023). Slap fighting’s popularity soared in October 2022 when the Nevada State Athletic Commission (NSAC) officially recognized it as a form of “unarmed combat” in a unanimous vote. Hunter Campbell, Chief Business Officer of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), appeared before the commission and rationalized the request for recognition by claiming the new “sport” to be no different from boxing or MMA. The main justification for sanctioning the ritual was given by NSAC executive director Jeff Mullen, who argued that slap fights would take place regardless, so it is preferable to have them recognized and conducted under medical supervision (Morgan, 2022).

In November 2022, Dana White announced the launch of a six-episode slap fighting reality show aired on TBS (originally an initialism of Turner Broadcasting System) (UFC, 2022). The program, called Power Slap: Road to the Title (“Power Slap”), received fairly substantial press coverage and social media exposure. Each episode was watched by an average of 309,000 viewers and the show peaked in its second episode at 413,000 viewers (Washburn, 2023). Twenty thousand YouTube subscribers watched videos of the new “sport” in 2023, and the most popular video received 608,000 views. Power Slap gained 868,000 followers on Instagram, 3.2 million followers on TikTok (with videos of the competitions receiving 18 million likes), 22,000 followers on Twitter, and 53,000 followers on Facebook (Reinsmith, 2023). These numbers are relatively low compared with older sports, but slap fighting is a young phenomenon and its popularity is on the rise. Famous supporters of the new “sport” include actor and social media personality Logan Alexander Paul and actor, producer, and former politician Arnold Schwarzenegger, who hosted a slap fighting event at a sports festival in Columbus, Ohio in 2022.

In January 2023, the organizers of these competitions decided to formalize them with the establishment of the Power Slap League. The prominent founder of the

new organization is businessman and UFC president Dana White (Dziak, 2023). Since the creators of this new “sport” are making efforts to institutionalize it and gain recognition from official bodies by asserting it to be no different from other sports, we will discuss the various definitions of sport and try to differentiate between legitimate sports and mutant sports.

3. What Constitutes a Sport? Or When Is a Sport Not a Sport?

Not all physical activity is considered a sport. According to Alan Guttmann’s sociological typology (Guttmann, 1994), there are three levels of physical activity: Play is defined as an activity characterized by freedom, non-utilitarianism, and the capacity to provide release from everyday constraints. Game refers to institutionalized but unprofessional sports activity such as neighborhood or workplace leagues. While both of these categories are physical activities, they are not defined as sports (Guttmann, 1978; Carmi & Lidor, 2024). Guttmann holds that for physical activity to be defined as a sport, it must meet the following criteria: secularism (physical activity that does not exist within the framework of a religious ceremony), standardization and equality (open participation and an identical starting point for all), bureaucratization (the activity is run by a sports organization), specialization (separation between spectator and player and expertise in one particular sport), quantification (clear, predefined criteria for victory), and documentation (records) (Guttmann, 1994).

Lidor et al. outlined six characteristics by which institutionalized physical activity can be defined as a sport (Lidor et al., 2011): (1) Physical activity: The activity must be physical and also entail mental and cognitive effort. (2) Emphasis on skill that aims to achieve the goal: The activity must express the skill of those engaging in it, which is aimed at achieving predefined goals. In most cases, the skill is acquired after a long training process and many years of practice. (3) Competitiveness: The activity expresses competition between individuals and teams. (4) Formal rules that are known and agreed upon: The activity is governed by a standardized set of rules that is known and agreed upon by all. Participants must follow the rules of the game and breaking them result in penalty, the rules of which are likewise known to all. (5) Institutionalization: The sporting activity must be institutionalized and regulated by national and international sports organizations. This entails the use of standardized facilities, official governing and officiating bodies, and formal training of professionals such as coaches, instructors, and referees. Finally, (6) Clear rules for winning, losing, and ties: The activity is founded on clear rules for the outcome achieved; it is clear to all what is considered a win, a loss, or a tie.

The criteria are significant from an economic standpoint, since officially recognizing a sport can support the establishment of budgetary policy and investment in boosting the popularity of new sports. Additionally, from a professional standpoint, establishing official criteria for sports is important for athletes, coaches, sports program directors, and sports psychologists and physicians, since doing so

defines the necessary physical, social, ethical, and psychological characteristics.

Slap fighting meets these criteria and is seemingly eligible to be considered an official sport. So why does it elicit our concern? It appears that the definition of sport is still vulnerable to the incursion of freak shows and rituals aspiring to be included in it. As we will see further on in this article, the organizers of Power Slap tournaments go to lengths to give them a sports-like character and make them difficult to distinguish from other sports, further muddying the distinction between legitimate sports and those that the authors believe should be denounced as imitations. One method we propose for identifying “imitation sports” is examining the value ascribed to victory and the manner by which contestants achieve it. To support a better understanding of our suggested mechanism, we will briefly shed light on the relationship between sports and media, the extreme version of which led to the emergence of what we call the “bottom-line sport” (BLS) model.

4. The Rise of the BLS Model

Sports undergo a dynamic process of regulatory changes that impact their character (Arias et al., 2011). One of the main reasons for changing the rules of a sport is the desire to attract a larger audience and promote commercialization through the media (Steen-Johnsen, 2008; Kew, 1990). Historically, sport and the media have maintained a long and mutually beneficial relationship: media helps sport gain standing and disseminates it throughout the world, while sport provides media outlets with interest, suspense, and gripping headlines that broaden their consumer base. The relationship between sport and the media has led to the rules of many sports being changed to simplify them, adapt them for the audience’s taste, and increase their economic potential (Marczinka & Gál, 2018).

The process of the commercialization of sport accelerated in the 1970s. Sport became a social, cultural, and especially economic pursuit that transcended borders and continents (Galily et al., 2009; Woods & Butler, 2026). Sport’s status in contemporary culture is the product of a long-term historical, cultural, and economic process in which it transformed completely from an amateur leisure-time pursuit into a daily preoccupation, in part, and for many, competitive (Lidor, 2007).

The popularity of sport led to it being adopted by print and broadcast media, particularly television channels, which became a central player in the sports industry, and which have been wielding direct influence over sport. In the aim of attracting ever more viewers to screens both large (television) and small (cell phones), many and diverse changes have been made to the format by which sports are played. In other words, media outlets not only disseminate sports among the population and increase the number of spectators, but they also shape them to the spectators’ taste. Television and the internet, which invented new platforms such as fantasy sports to enable fans more active involvement, were not content with this for long; they also increased their influence over the manner in which athletes compete—in the swimming pool and on the field, court, and track.

The list of changes undergone by different sports since television became a central player in the industry is long and varied. Following are a just few of the changes made to sports in recent years aimed at better marketing them to their target demographic (Hagay, 2016; Deninger, 2012; Houlihan, 2015; Harvey, 2015; Duncan, 2020):

Changing the rules of the game: Many sports have modified their rules to make them quick-paced and more gripping for spectators. Examples include adding shot clocks in basketball, changing the scoring method in gymnastics, tennis, and volleyball, and adding advertising breaks such as timeouts in basketball. These changes limited the length of matches and overtime (where necessary) and made the games faster and more visual.

Scheduling adjustments: Nearly every sport has been required to adapt to television broadcasting schedules in order to maximize viewership. Games and competitions are scheduled for prime time and not necessarily for the comfort of the athletes. The adapted scheduling is especially conspicuous during important international events such as the Olympics and world championships in ball sports, athletics, and swimming.

Turning sport into an entertainment event: The use of advanced filming technologies (slow-motion, replays, drone cameras) has turned home viewing into an experience that is sometimes even better than watching the event while sitting in the stadium or sports arena. Advanced technology is utilized in all sports, both large (baseball, hockey, football, basketball) and small (bowling, wrestling, fencing).

Assistance for referees/judges: The use of video technologies in sport has also impacted the manner in which decisions are made by referees and judges. Examples include cameras and advanced technologies such as the ones used in soccer games by the video assistant referee, who reviews decisions made by the referee using video footage and personal headsets for communication. This technology is designed to provide home viewers with the “visual truth”, which changes the natural flow of the game. Another example is the Hawk-Eye computer vision system, which is used to visually monitor the ball’s movement and display a profile of its predicted trajectory in a moving image. This system is used in over 20 sports, including badminton, tennis, volleyball, cricket, and rugby. The system helps viewers gain a more tactical understanding of the developments of the game.

Expanding broadcasting rights and establishing a media-based economy: Broadcasting rights for sporting events have become the main source of income for many leagues and teams (especially in ball sports), enabling them to pay huge salaries, particularly to players and coaches, but also to other professionals involved in the global sports industry: referees, managers, data analysts, and spokespeople. Television enables sports to be consumed from anywhere in the world, crowning athletes as international sports heroes.

Slap fighting does not require any such regulatory changes because it was conceived from the outset for TikTok, a platform that is based on short-form video

content. The brief standard length of videos on TikTok rules out the possibility of prolonged competition. What is more, the actual contest between opponents is almost entirely non-existent; the format is designed such that the start of the match is both the event itself and its finish line. Slap fighting effectively eliminates the competitors' scope of action. Motionlessness is a fundamental component of the ritual, and breaking it is considered an infraction. The bout itself is astoundingly short, just the duration of a slap, unless the competitors can absorb the blow without falling (as explained above). The ritual thus removes the "preliminary play" characterized by sophisticated maneuvers and tactics, which is what gives real sports their magic and serves as a metaphor for life itself (Carmi, 2025).

In contrast, slap fighting focuses exclusively on the final outcome, the knockout that causes the loser to collapse, namely, the "bottom-line". In this context, note that slap fight training covers only attacks, since protecting one's face or dodging a slap is prohibited. The striker rejoicing over an opponent's collapse is the climax of the fight. The time cameras and spectators spend focused on the gloating victor and the unconscious opponent outlasts the duration of the fight itself.

5. Gloating as a Supreme Value

Competitive sports, particularly combat sports, epitomize the tension between opponents because they are a zero-sum game. More specifically, one participant's gain comes at the expense of the other participants, and hence there is an absolute conflict of interest between the sides. Since sport is based on a winner-loser hierarchy, the struggle in the arena fuels feelings of honor and prestige on one hand and disappointment and humiliation on the other. These emotions are intensified by the contests being held in the public sphere under the gaze of rival athletes, coaches, and above all crowds of spectators, in the eyes of whom the athletes see themselves reflected (Steele et al., 2019). Indeed, in modern sport the spectators are not just a decorative backdrop, but rather an inseparable part of the show (McNamee, 2002). The athletes' feelings are exposed to all, and the expression of these feelings is part of the show (Miller, 1993) (p. 145).

Anyone who has won a sporting contest can attest to the pride experienced after such an achievement. Inner pride, which we call "authentic", rewards years of perseverance, discipline, and personal investment, and contributes to an athlete's ability to cope with challenges. In competitive sports, this personal investment is expressed in victories, medals, and social media exposure (Sparkes et al., 2013). But there is another type of pride, which we call "hubristic", and which is based on a sense of superiority (Aicinena, 2011). This pride does not merely stem from personal achievement, but is chiefly related to gloating over another's loss. And indeed, any loss in a sports competition involves embarrassment and even humiliation. These emotions show up in how athletes perceive themselves or how they see themselves reflected in the eyes of those around them; and they occupy an important place, especially in competitive sport contexts where the body is both the athlete's instrument and a product that is publicly judged (Steele et al., 2019).

These upsetting experiences are subjective and vary in intensity from athlete to athlete (Ryall, 2019).

Shame is considered one of the central emotions of self-awareness. In competitive sports, the athlete's body is the focus of constant judgement and comparison. When the experience of being judged is repetitive and frequent, it can develop into "chronic shame", which increases the risk of a negative body image and aggravates the related distress (Cooper et al., 2020; Şentürk & Gobel, 2023). Unfortunately, attempts to define shame and distinguish it from other uncomfortable experiences encounter significant difficulties, as the term tends to elude any categorical definition. Moreover, it is used differently in different languages and is often closely associated with other concepts such as embarrassment.

Sabini et al. differentiate between embarrassment and shame. According to them, athletes who lose a competition may feel embarrassed because they sense their image has been marred by poor ability (Sabini et al., 2001). Shame, on the other hand, characterizes athletes who are responding to a sense of damage to their value as human beings (Lewis, 2019). The intensity of an athlete's embarrassment is directly linked to their ability to isolate themselves from the prying eyes of spectators and the media, which are liable to undermine their sense of capability (Vani et al., 2020). There is likewise a distinction between embarrassment and shame in the duration of the experience and the willingness to admit to it. While embarrassment passes relatively quickly and those experiencing it are willing to admit to its existence, shame is a deeper emotion that causes distress for a comparatively long period, and people tend to be less willing to expose it (Sabini et al., 2001). In essence, embarrassment indicates a temporary misrepresentation of the real "me", while shame is the experience of injury to the self itself. Embarrassment is caused by an athlete's mistakes in competition being exposed, while shame points to their flaws as a human being (Sabini et al., 2001). Athletes are usually able to successfully handle competitive failure and the ensuing embarrassment; but they struggle to cope with the shame experienced after being insulted as individuals and the loss of control they feel as a result (Sabini et al., 2001; Tangney et al., 1996). Insulting athletes as individuals can manifest as accusations of match-fixing or doping, which are moral failings that indicate bad character. Conversely, losing an important competition might embarrass an athlete, but it will not threaten their essence as a person. Importantly, however, despite the conceptual distinction between shame and embarrassment, the two are often intertwined (Dixon, 1992; McNamee, 2002).

Thus far we have briefly discussed shame and embarrassment, which are reflective and self-aware emotions belonging to an individual's inner world. But others are not always aware of these emotions, and were it not for the accompanying physical manifestations such as blushing, elevated heart rate, and the like, they would remain the private domain of the individual. By contrast, an athlete's humiliation is a public experience of shame in which the public gaze is fixated on the subject, conveying ridicule and scorn (Klein, 1991).

Directing ridicule at the loser of a sports competition is completely antithetical to the principles of Olympism (International Olympic Committee (IOC), 2026). Winners gloating over the fall of their opponents is the polar opposite of the principle of respect established by Pierre de Coubertin when laying the foundations of the Olympic movement (Lenk, 2016). We argue that unlike legitimate sports, slap fighting is grounded in gloating, which is also its overall aim². A distinction must be made between this emotion, which is based on deriving pleasure from the suffering of others, and *schadenfreude*, or the feeling of satisfaction that results from the defeat of a team or athlete who “deserves” to lose on the grounds of proportional justice or retribution for mistakes (Leach et al., 2015). At the base of the latter is the underlying hope that the defeated team or athlete will learn a lesson and return to succeed. Gloating refers to blatantly and ostentatiously boasting and directing condescension and scorning at the defeated opponent, and even taking spiteful satisfaction in their distress (Leach et al., 2015). Ortony et al. argue that gloating is openly expressing pleasure at the suffering of a defeated rival, especially when it is experienced as the victor’s empowered state of superiority (Ortony et al., 1988). McNamee defines gloating as deriving enjoyment from the misfortune of others, and claims that gloating is not prevalent even in brutal sports such as boxing (McNamee, 2003). Boxers may be glad when they knock their rivals to the ground, but they rarely mock them or gloat over them. In most combat sports, a sense of mutual respect prevails between competitors before and after the fight. By most accounts, the spectators and fans enjoy the contestants’ injuries more than their opponents in the ring, especially when the media presents the contenders as ambassadors of rival ethnic groups or feuding societies (McNamee, 2003).

Despite the apparent similarity between boxing and slap fighting, we maintain that striking an opponent in boxing is fundamentally distinct from slapping the cheek of a motionless opponent whose hands are clasped behind their back. Punching the face of a fellow boxer is considered instrumental violence intended to best them (with a knockout or with points)³. Boxers train for defending themselves as much as for striking their challengers. Moreover, forcing opponents into a position of defense is used as a strategy to prevent them from attacking. In slap fighting, on the other hand, there is a clear separation between delivering and receiving a slap, which are performed alternately until one competitor collapses. Slapping someone who is not allowed to defend themselves is designed to humiliate them. The shaming and humiliation entailed in knocking an opponent to the ground is incomplete if said opponent tries to dodge the slap. It is worth mentioning that there exists a certain similarity between this willingness to receive a slap and self-flagellation, which is a traditional mourning ritual in some societies (Kozlovsky Golan, 2017: p. 288). Indeed, we argue that Power Slap is characterized by

²Gloating is distinct from *schadenfreude*, which refers to a passive and covert sense of happiness at another person’s failure, but without deriving personal pleasure from their defeat (Leach et al., 2015).

³See Bar-Eli & Tenenbaum (1996) for more on the distinction between instrumental aggression and hostile aggression (Bar-Eli & Tenenbaum, 1996).

objectifying and humiliating contestants for ratings, and by dehumanization that runs contrary to every Olympic principle. In its sports discourse, the contrasting pair of “winner-loser” is replaced by “humiliator-humiliated”.

Let us revisit Gur-Ze’ev’s article pointing to the changing trends of sports consumption as a reflection of human society in the era in which we live. Gur-Ze’ev warned against an “exile of the spirit” from sport and addiction to a “culture that dulls, pleasures, and numbs the minds of its consumer-producers (...) while transforming the very essence of the love of life” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2007). In his words: “The self as athlete and spectator functions as a commodity in the cultural marketplace (...) and generates a chauvinistic collectivism that has become beast-like.” He eulogizes sports as an agent of humane values in the cyberspace era, an age that has seen the dissolution of the traditional understanding of the body as an object for shaping and as the dwelling place of the soul.

Finally, it is difficult to ignore the “arena” in which slap fighting takes place: the cheeks. The cheeks function as notice boards that accompany people wherever they go. Social groups in various places throughout history have engraved distinctive markings on their cheeks to indicate their status in the community. The ancient Greeks used the term stigma (originally referring to a brand seared into the skin with a hot iron) to denote physical markers intended to expose and condemn an individual’s perceived moral deviance or inferior status. The custom was to maim “unacceptable” individuals such as slaves, criminals, and traitors so the scar would publicly mark the person as blemished (Kama & First, 2015).

Numerous African tribes have a custom of scarring the cheeks for various reasons. Members of the royal family in the Mossi tribe, for example, identify each other with such scars, on the right cheek for men and the left for women (Cullivan, 1998). The Tandambas tribe had a custom of scarring both cheeks until recently, when the influence of modernism put an end to the practice (Cullivan, 1998). Members of the Sisaala tribe also scar their cheeks to help them identify one another (Cullivan, 1998), while the Ashanti tribe has a practice of scarring children’s cheeks for healing (Cullivan, 1998). Similarly, in the Ewe and Akan tribes it is customary to scar symbols onto the cheeks of children for religious and spiritual purposes (Irving, 2007). Mutilating the children’s cheeks and marring their smooth faces is intended to ward off evil spirits. Tribal markings helped identify individuals and the tribe to which they belong, especially during the era of the slave trade. In certain villages, such as Ginkpan in Ghana, the villagers adorn their faces with scars for decorative purposes (Irving, 2007). By contrast, in many Western societies, the cheek was used as a badge of shame. Slashing a criminal’s face indicated disloyalty to the social group to which he belonged. The curved cuts in the victim’s cheeks resulted in a smiling appearance known as the “Glasgow smile” after the capital of Scotland, where the practice first became commonplace. Criminal gangs in England adopted this form of punishment and dubbed it the “Chelsea grin” after the neighborhood in which they operated (Bannister & Fraser, 2008; Burger, 2009).

In Europe cheek scars did not always indicate the disgrace of those who bore them. Sometimes they actually served as an access card to high society (Frevert, 1995). From the 1700s through the mid-1800s, an academic fencing ritual called *Mensur* was widespread, especially in central Europe. It was common for student organizations to engage in *Mensur*, which served as a test of courage by which new members were admitted. This was a duel, in which each fencer aimed to mark the face of his opponent using a sword called *Schläger* (Baldick, 1965: p. 149). As in slap fighting, any dodging or flinching movement during a duel was seen as an indication of cowardice. The cut on a dueler's face was called a *Schmiss*, and after the duel, the students stitched up the cuts with deliberate brutality. At the "patient's" request, they poked a horsehair into the bleeding wound, causing it to fester and result in a more prominent scar. There are known cases of youth who, too afraid to fight, cut their own faces with a razor to give themselves the appearance of duelers and enjoy the accompanying prestige (McAleer, 1994).

6. Discussion

This article aims to describe and warn of a new trend in sport: Practices aspiring to be recognized as legitimate sports that could undermine the entire moral foundation upon which modern sport is based. Slap fighting has seemingly adopted all the sporting criteria entailed in the concept of fair play: reciprocity, weight categories, predefined rules, objective judging, and medical supervision. But it is empty of fundamental components that define sport—the values shared by humanity as a whole—and, instead, sets humiliation and shaming as lofty goals and positions them as the climax of the event. In other words, standardized sport is not merely the result of a formal definition; we would like to believe that it embodies humane values. Yet, these values are highly elusive to define, as they vary from place to place and change over time. Regardless, Power Slap, in our opinion, embodies the exact opposite, unless there comes a day when sports authorities define violence for its own sake and humiliation as part of the sporting spirit.

In the article, we discussed the trend of simplifying the rules of sports, shortening the duration of matches, and shrinking the space in which they are held, all in the name of generating greater interest among spectators. Power Slap took this trend several steps further by designing a sport for social media, in which the event takes place in a static space and lasts no longer than the blink of an eye. The excitement it stirs is the product of the humiliation of competitors who sustain significant physical damage. The limited research analyzing this phenomenon to date highlights its inherent neurological risks. Due to the novelty of this discipline, the volume of available data does not yet match the extensive literature found in established sports such as boxing (Lavadi et al., 2024; Lima et al., 2025). Importantly, even if empirical evidence demonstrates that the injuries sustained in slap-fights do not exceed those of conventional sports, the ethical dimensions of sportsmanship must remain central to discourse. Sport serves as a reflection of societal values; consequently, it is our collective responsibility to determine the specific so-

matic and physical cultures we choose to adopt.

Slap fighting is not the only mutation spawned by social media. The trend of sports designed according to a BLS format is only starting. Another practice that has recently emerged calls itself Run It Straight. Like slap fighting, the competition is based on a simple concept: Two participants run full speed at one another until they collide; the one who falls first loses. If both contestants manage to stay on their feet, the judges determine who the dominant collider is. This trend resembles rugby or American football, but focuses only on the violent collision between players and eliminates most other parts of the game. Like slap fighting, this BLS competition presents the appearance of a sport, and its contestants compete under medical supervision. Brandon Taua'a, one of the founders of the Australian RUNIT League, justifies the practice's existence by claiming that boxing is just as violent (Lam & Turbull, 2025).

The dangerous influence BLS practices such as Power Slap and Run It Straight are liable to have on the development of sport is related to the link between sport and values. Two basic approaches interpret this link differently. The first, an internalist approach, maintains that sport is a source of value in itself. The second, an externalist instrumentalist approach, holds that sport itself is not inherently value-laden; instead, it reflects society's values or even helps enforce them (Simon, 2000). While the latter views sport as an instrument for promoting external goals in realms such as society, politics, and religion (Loland, 2004), slap fighting, which was created for social media and designed to encourage perversion in viewers, exploits its commercial potential and ignores the values that make up the foundations of an enlightened society.

What is more, we need only observe these new cultural heroes slapping one another in the name of sport to learn something about ourselves as a society. Sports heroes fulfil an important societal role. Through their excellence, they embody the values that society adopts and the way it seeks to be perceived. Sports heroes are expected to serve as role models by virtue of their heroic deeds on or off the field. In examining how outstanding athletes are crowned as heroes and adopted as role models, various studies have tried to identify the motives for the general public's admiration and worship of these athletes. Some claim that they give hope to the "simple man" who aspires to realize his dreams despite the difficulties he faces (Rader, 1983). At times, it is the athletes' courageous stand in contending with forces greater than themselves, and not necessarily their successes or achievements, that elevates their standing in the public eye (Rauch, 1996). Moreover, it is not only the struggles against external forces that are considered expressions of heroism, but also the struggles with urges and desires, and likewise, contending with crises such as serious injuries or illness (Keczer et al., 2016). Thus, identification with sports heroes depends on their ability to demonstrate nobility of spirit alongside human simplicity (Woolridge, 2002).

Sports heroes inspire and captivate the public even long after retiring from their athletic careers. The halls of fame immortalizing their names, the sports albums

depicting their achievements, and the commemorative corners dedicated to them in museums are testament to this (Snyder, 1991). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the intensity of the emotional response triggered by the drama of athletic contest, and the wish to preserve this in the public consciousness. The struggles and tensions inherent in sport symbolize the challenges faced by society and the perpetual need to overcome them (van Hilvoorde & Stokvis, 2013). Sports legends that spark the imagination thus have a long lifespan despite the athletes' relatively short careers (Woolridge, 2002). While sports heroes attain their status in the context of the social and cultural reality in which they operate, the legends surrounding their character and heroic deeds are seared into collective memory and pass from generation to generation as models to be preserved (Bifulco & Tirino, 2018).

Now back to the slappers (and colliders), those cultural heroes forged by social media in the third decade of the twenty-first century: The mechanism that shapes them as "role models" places a mirror in front of us, their audience, through which the tangible reality of our lives is reflected. We must ask ourselves: Are these truly the cultural heroes who serve as examples for our children? What values do they represent? Have our dreams, our aspirations, and the values we ascribe to sports heroes, and by extension, to ourselves and each other, truly become a thing of the past?

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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