Sport and Poetry : An Exploration of the Inter-Relatedness of Words and Actions

Ardis C. Resen

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SPORT AND POETRY:
An Exploration of the Inter-relatedness of Words and Actions

BY
ARDIS C. RESEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science, Major in Health Physical Education, and Recreation
South Dakota State University
1981
SPORT AND POETRY:

An Exploration of the Inter-relatedness of Words and Actions

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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The unfailing support and optimism of my husband Maynard Resen was important to the completion of this writing.

A humble thanks to you all,

ACR

Philosophical research explored the nature of physical and linguistic responses to memorable or peak experiences. Literature was cited to prove that sport and poetry are related as experience and expression, to show that the human desire is to communicate experience to another, to show that sports-minded persons have a desire to verbalize their peak experiences in sports, and to illustrate that sport and poetry are related to the whole person. Shared terminology of sport and poetry was defined and explored in order to demonstrate a further relationship. Some of the major terms were rhythm, form, flow, style, grace, economy and harmony. However, over forty terms were delineated. Ten sports poems were analyzed for mechanics and expression to illustrate that poetry has been used to effectively describe and celebrate the sport experience. Poetry brings one closest to the physical event, yet retains the mystery and magic of sports. Poetry is an art that can successfully describe and communicate the experience of sport and so belongs together with sports.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Human experience is a basic element of the gossamer thread that is life. Communication or response to experience relates human beings to one another. Humans have an inborn desire to "tell" their experiences. Words accompany actions. Movement is experience that, in general, evokes response and expression.

The physical response begins with gesture, which is then refined in many stages. It moves to patterned gross motor movements, is refined to amateur sport participation, and moves through the skill levels to the finesse of highly skilled performance. For example, a child may make a gesture of dismissal by pushing a person away or motioning away from his body. He then learns to dismiss small objects in a similar way by throwing them. This throwing pattern may evolve into pitching a baseball for Little League games and then develop until he becomes a professional baseball pitcher. The expression of language begins with the guttural response, which brings words and actions together. For example, consider the "ughhhh!" of the shot putter as he releases the shot--the response is part of the action. The lingual response can then be refined in moves analogous with the moves refining the physical response. It can move from words to sentences to story-telling to poetry. The ultimate examination of an experience through words is poetry, because it
utilizes the physical nuances of rhythm, meter, accent, and rhyme in addition to the denotations and connotations of the words.

Linguistic moves are similar to physical moves, in that the experience must come first. Early man told his stories of the hunt and they became part of the experience, but he needed a frame of reference first. He needed the actuality of the hunt. His desire to share his response created the story. It is impossible to think that anyone today would not desire to share the experience of a hole-in-one or a grand slam, for instance.

The experience is the initiator, and it also completes a cycle, because good poetry brings the reader back to the physical event. Therefore, poetry and sports are not so much analogous, as a continuation of the same thing—the actual experience. The cycle of experience and response is illustrated in Figure 1 on the following page. The figure demonstrates that all responses begin with experience. If the experience is memorable enough, the desire to communicate it will lead completely through the cycle and one may find one's self back to the original event or a similar one. The figure also shows the analogous moves of linguistic and physical refinement. These steps of refinement bring one closer and closer to the actual experience that started the cycle.

In sport, language is part of the game. Microphones bring the guttural responses of the participants closer to the audience. But actual words—language in a more refined sense—have been devalued in recent years, especially in the area of sport, which
The cycle begins at the top center with a memorable experience of the total person. Moving clockwise, the experience elicits a response of some type. A desire to express the response more fully, combined with conscious thought, brings the response to refinement. The physical steps of refinement are on the outer circle. These correlate with the linguistic moves on the inner circle. The physical and the linguistic are reunited as they draw near the initial event. A new or similar experience may then occur, and the cycle begins anew.
should be rich in language. Today's culture seems to assume that the only way to communicate the physical is by visual means. But sport should be able to reach other levels of understanding because it has become such a pervasive force in modern society. It catches the interest of the young and the old. It evokes excitement from the educated and the uneducated. It extracts devotion from the rural citizens and the city residents. Sport permeates all levels of human existence because it answers the innate need of all people to play. Sport calls forth the full range of human emotions. Sport gives man an ideal of excellence to cling to in an ever-changing world.

Athletes occupy positions of great importance on the American scene. They are idolized and they are imitated. Their feats are replayed, rehashed, and re-interpreted. The athletes, and coaches, too, are considered the great achievers of society. But in another sense, some of them have failed. They have failed to express the inner thoughts and insights they have experienced. They have failed to transmit to others the understandings their experiences have given them. This failure is obvious when one listens to the banal, mediocre, trite comments made by some sports commentators, many of whom are former athletes. It is obvious in the common and cliche-filled language of the coaches and athletes in interviews. It is obvious from the misunderstandings that exist between the intellectual, artistic areas of culture and the sport world.
In order to bridge the gap between the intellectual and the physical, participants, coaches, fans, reporters, and supporters of athletics (sports-minded persons) have to realize that only through meaningful, exact, and definitive communication can others come to see the value of their experiences in sport. Then, perhaps, these others may come to share this value; they may learn to understand themselves and interpret memorable experiences of life to their fullest because of the expressed response to an experience.

Sport provides metaphors for many aspects of life, such as cooperation, sexuality, religion, man's identity, or death, but the metaphors require interpretation. Sports-minded persons are the ones most capable of translating sport; they should lead in explicating its meanings.

"...Poetry is the perfect language for describing sports (Evans and Woodard)." Poetry can immortalize the great moments of sports. It makes the peak experiences of sport available to all people. It expresses the emotions of sport as well as the actions. Not only can the sports-minded person learn to use poetry to express himself, but also, if he will approach poetry without prejudice, he will find profitable additions to his own understanding of the peak moments and his sport experience in general. Savoring an accomplishment in quiet retrospect is at times more enjoyable than the original moment when emotions were high and the mind was preoccupied. The poet is best able to preserve the joy of the event and to elevate it from the common.
Sport and poetry belong together. They share a sense of physical involvement, they share a love of life and an exaltation of life, they share a sense of craftsmanship and creation, and they celebrate the total person in the totality of his existence.

In the discussion which follows, sport and poetry will be shown to belong together in three ways: (1) both are expression and experience; (2) they have a shared vocabulary; and (3) the sports poem can effectively describe and communicate the sport experience. During the discussion of sport and poetry as expression and experience, it has seemed advisable to cite a great deal of literature research. The discussion progresses from meanings of movement, to the need for expression, to poetry's expressive qualities. The conclusion is that sport and poetry belong together. The section on vocabulary is used to show that two areas which have often been considered as opposites are actually related through their terminology. The third section illustrates that poetry has been effectively used to describe and celebrate sports. The term "poetry" is used by the writer as a generic term. It is meant to include poetic language—a creative intensification of experience—rather than poetry exclusively. Poetry, then, is an art that can successfully describe and communicate the experience of sport and so belongs together with sports.
SPORT AND POETRY ARE EXPRESSION AND EXPERIENCE

Sport is expression and experience because the activity is meaningful. Physical movement is meaningful in and of itself because it is the essential property of life. Wallace Stevens expresses this truth in his poem "Life Is Motion." The last two lines are extremely effective: "Celebrating the marriage/ Of flesh and air."

Man moves because it feels good to experience the air against his flesh.

Meaning in Movement

According to Gray (1966:20), "Meaning is inherent in human movement...." Even when the meaning is not consciously recognized, it is there. Ellfeldt and Metheny (1958:270) feel that the meaning "...may be vague, fragmentary, or transient; it may be definite, organized, long-lasting. It may be functional...or non-utilitarian," but it is part of a person's total experiencing which adds meaning to a human life. They clarify their explanation as follows:

Human movement differs from animal movement because man is able to think [italics in original] about his own movement. He can conceptualize his kinesthetic perception of his own movements. And he can try to "make sense" out of these conceptualizations by philosophizing about them within the context of his own structure of human meanings and values (Ellfeldt and Metheny, 1958:264).
In this brief exploration of the relationship between movement and meaning, it will be helpful to explore the works of Metheny. She was one of the first to analyze, thoroughly and specifically, the sources and types of meanings found in movement.

According to Metheny (1968), the first type of movement-with-meaning is that which arrives before an idea truly takes shape—the restless, nervous energy that is visible as a thought evolves. Next are gestures, spontaneous expressions of confused ideas and feelings, as man tries to communicate his ideas to his companions. The gestures develop into patterns called dance, which is meaningful if it develops for recognition any ideas, feelings, and emotions. Metheny (1968) feels that man dances or participates in sports in order to evoke and experience specific feelings and emotions. According to Metheny (1965:21), movement is valuable in the following manner:

\[
\text{Movement is} \ldots \text{meaningful to men in the same way that all man-made forms of behavior are meaningful. We create our man-made forms of movement to make the sense that life makes to us more articulate [italics not in original], and in doing this we enlarge the store of meanings we find in the experience of life.}
\]

Movement patterns are created by man to "articulate" the meaning of his living experience. By the moving experience he is in turn increasing his own understanding of his life, which in turn gives him more to express. A cycle of expression and experience through movement has been formed.

Metheny (1964) asserts that close intimacy and interaction of conscious thought and voluntary movement has been confirmed by
many neurophysiologists. "...Man learns to think by moving and learns to move by thinking...," according to Metheny (1964:50). She also stresses that now "...we know that the movements of men's bodies must be prized equally with the thoughts that animate them."

Movement is a central aspect of life. Through movement experiences man is able to discover and express his keenest satisfactions, his creative tendencies, and his yearning for success; he is attuned to his environment; and he is given awareness of himself and life around him. As Metheny (1965:113) has summarized:

Movement...is a meaningful experience to a human being because the kinesthetic perception of movement supplies one of the strands out of which the fabric of meanings which constitute a human life is woven.

The Sport Experience

Sport is a man-made arena for patterned movement. According to Metheny (1968) the importance of patterned movement is not found in philosophic writing, nor is it limited to the purview of education. Rather, the importance of the experience is found in the lives of millions of people who have found meaning in their own involvement as participants, coaches, or spectators. As Lewis (1973:2) declares, "...We realize that sport permeates all levels of human existence because all people have an innate need to play and to express themselves thereby...."

Slusher (1967:106-7) gives the sport experience the following importance:
Sport has a meaning that encompasses the human sphere. The sport action shows man what is, both in the world and in himself. I am almost tempted to say that man is whole only when he engages in sport.

Man's imagination and will drive him to sport and in so doing bring him to a meaning of existence. The individual's perception of reality in sport may well reveal things and events that formulate meaningful concepts of the dynamics of existence.

Slusher (1967) places further emphasis on the personal nature of sport experiences: "Sport cannot be simply known [italics in original], it must be experienced in a felt way." Slusher feels that sport itself supports a holistic concept of man and leaves no room for the prevalent body-mind dichotomy; "in sport, man is his body." To summarize Slusher's ideas: "Sport affords man the opportunity to go beyond the everyday."

Sport is expressive, also. As Lewis (1973:3) states, sport is communication. It is a reflection of culture and is often representative of goals and ideals which a society values but in actuality is unable to reach. Sport is experiential and expressive as a creative art form. Miller and Russell (1971) contend that sport is an art because it is an articulate form of communication.

Sport Is Art

Thomas (1972) thinks sport and art share an aesthetic bond that is formed by experience--the "doing" or creating. Kuntz (1974) favorably compares the emotional quality of sports and arts, especially that of music. This is well illustrated by video replays of sport movements artistically set to music. The emotional response is
intensified as the two art forms correspond with one another. Kuntz also views a sporting contest as a type of drama, usually tragic, but occasionally comic. Kaelin (1968) believes that "well-played games" are a necessity for aesthetic quality in sport. Kleinman (1968) proposes that theories of sport are comparable to theories in art or aesthetics. Specific sports have been described as arts; for example, Sheehan (1978) claims that the sport of running is an art. According to Weiss (1969:245), an artist and an athlete are similar, as each "...is occupied with producing something with which he can live for a while, and which, so far, enables him to be self-sufficient."

It is important, however, not to simply compare sport to other forms of art, but to examine it aesthetically, for beauty is probably the most common ingredient of art. Lowe (1977) is an author who has written at great length on the beauty of sport. Included in his book The Beauty of Sport is a chapter titled, "The Relationship of Sport and Art." He emphasizes that sport and art have a relationship as found on artifacts of antiquity, such as coins, shields, or vases. He lists some art-sport similarities: an exciting, emotional setting; a structure for expressing human experience; a creative outlet which allows for originality, openness, independence, and playfulness; and a lack of useful purpose, that is, it is non-utilitarian. "The only justification for art and for sport is the 'delirious joy.'"
Sport and art both imply process and product—the action and the completed result. As in arts like dance and drama, at times the product of sport is difficult to define. Lowe (1977) interprets sport as a "pure" performing art and as a representational form for society. In probing the question of whether an athlete is an artist, Lowe (1977) uses the testimony of athletes themselves. Steve Prefontaine, distance runner, is quoted as saying, "I'm an artist, a performer." Lowe (1977:113) supplies the following testimony as well:

...Tom Sullivan, running-back for the Philadelphia Eagles is a painter. He is quoted as saying: Running with the ball, you can express yourself in motion; the gestures, the moves are creative and spontaneous; it's poetic [and satisfies] a need for self-expression.

Man has an innate need for unity and completion. He regrets incompletely tasks. His reaction is to bring the parts of a puzzle together into a whole. Lowe (1977:181) states, "Sport has a wholeness as works of art have a wholeness." All sports events have a built-in completion, either through time elapse or score. Man seems unsatisfied when contests are allowed to end in a tie. This seems to detract from the "wholeness."

Man finds a source of beauty in nature. The natural human body can be appreciated for its intrinsic beauty. Beauty in sports is basically the beauty of nature which becomes art when it is expressed. The movements of the body are the art or the expression. The observer, too, becomes part of the art experience as he responds vicariously.
The relationship of sport and art is well summarized by a
quote from John Dewey as used by Lowe (1977:276): "The sources of
art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the
tense grace of the ball-player infects the on-looking crowd."

**Sport--"The Perfect Moment"**

As movement is refined from unconscious fidgeting through
gestures to the patterns found in sport, it reaches its climax in
"the perfect moment." This term was used by Thomas (1972) in her
doctoral dissertation. It refers to the ultimate sport experience
and is most often, although not exclusively, experienced by the highly
skilled participant. The perfect moment concept is not meant to im­
ply perfection, but a peak experience. Thomas states that this
experience must involve "the integration of mind and body committed
wholly to the movement and the experience." It is "perfect" because
the performer is "one" with his movement.

According to Thomas (1972:4), "...Engagement in sport is a
valid and genuine aesthetic experience." The point of focus in this
"aesthetic experience" would be the natural beauty of the human body
involved in graceful, efficient, effortless, and skilled movement.
This sport-aesthetic experience must be experiential--"a living and
on-going process." Thomas (1972:146) equated the perfect moment in
sport with the aesthetic experience in art, which "...was further
characterized by an emotional or feeling response by the performer who
has achieved, or undergone, this perfect moment." Thomas provides
experiential descriptions by athletes in various sports to give validity to the concept. "The perfect moment," states Thomas (1972:82), "occurs in the struggle, in the effort, in the process." It cannot be planned; it simply happens. It is not repeatable in totality. However, she says that "one knows when the perfect moment is over and it can be defined apart from the rest of routine existence."

Kuntz (1974:21) refers to perfect moments as "...intense moments of emotional climax and unification...." Bannister (1963) describes such moments in his book, The Four Minute Mile. Sheehan (1978:113) continually searches for the perfect moment in his running—when his body and mind truly become one with the world around him:

"The meaning of life is found in revelation, a revelation that is present in each of us. To be found where our blood and flesh whisper to our unconscious."

Metheny (1968) accurately portrays the perfect moment as it is available to the sport participant and spectator at any skill level. She contends that man involves himself in the sport experience "...because it interests him and because he finds that involvement meaningful in its own right....It creates a meaningful image of himself at his utmost."

Thomas (1972) contends that viewing a sport cannot be part of the aesthetic experience, the perfect moment. She believes that "doing" is most important. Metheny (1968:82), on the other hand, suggests that if a spectator can empathize with other men, he may
share the performer's feelings in sport. She feels that the spectator can make these feelings his own through response of his sensitive inner self. Tests using electrodes have shown that spectators also respond physically as they share with the activity and the athlete they are viewing. As Lowe (1977) suggests, there is "...symbolic communication operating between athlete and spectator." This is similar to "the power of beauty to move a person to emotions of ecstasy and joy..." in the arts and in nature. Lowe feels that an observer can grasp beauty by witnessing the sport in action.

Sport, as an art form, is expression. Gray (1966:20) stresses that "movement can transmit images that would be impossible with words." Sport-minded persons have long been considered as non-verbal people who express themselves through the sport experience. Sports-minded people have aided this image by pointing out the weaknesses of striving to find words to fit the experience and meaning of sport. They have believed the experience was too personal and could only be shared through similar movement experiences. Yet many skillful athletes have experienced feelings that they want to share with their fellow athletes and with others. They desire to demonstrate that the experience means more than the sweat on their bodies. According to Gaumer (1962), the movements of man are symbols that cannot be translated into words. However, words are symbols, also. Movement symbols and verbal symbols can be joined. Gaskin and Masterson (1974) simply feel that sport can speak for itself and needs no verbal interpretation. The weakness of this position is
that sports have so much to offer. Verbal interpretations can help individuals share with each other and so broaden their own scope of experience. Communication will result in increased understanding among athletes, coaches, spectators, and non-sports-minded persons.

Sport is also experience. The peak experience is a noteworthy occasion in the life of a sports-minded person. R. Tait McKenzie understood the experience of the "perfect moment"; he understood poetically, scientifically, and artistically and so created a plaque and called it, "The Joy of Effort." Lowe (1977:xiv) explains McKenzie's portrayal:

...This feeling of the joy of effort can come at that supreme moment when the self reacts to the sport situation with a totality of muscular strength, control, achievement in absolute inner recognition. It cannot be measured for it is too spontaneous. That moment can be relived in diluted fashion in the flush of post-activity exhilaration--which can, but need not be associated with victory over others. Personal success over one's previous "bests" will elicit the sensation. Everybody is capable of feeling it...if they have the commitment to excel in sport activity for its own sake. The rewards attendant on the personal feeling of the beauty of sport can be shared only in the telling [italics not in original].

A Need for Expression

Humans need to communicate with one another and share their feelings. If an experience makes one feel good, the natural tendency is to tell someone about it. It can be "shared only in the telling." A person will want to share even his most mystical and personal experiences with someone at some time. It is natural for one to want to know if he is alone in his joy or confusion or sorrow.
At times, one wants to share as a lesson for those who are younger in experience. Whatever the purpose or reason, the response is the same. Man is a communal being and he needs to communicate. Also, through his communication he increases his understanding, or is given a form of emotional release. The poem by Wallace Stevens, "Life Is Motion," which was referred to earlier in the discussion of movement meanings, also expresses the joy of sharing a movement experience. The poem in entirety is as follows:

In Oklahoma,
Bonnie and Josie,
Dressed in calico,
Danced around a stump.
They cried,
"Ohoyaho,
Ohoo"...
Celebrating the marriage
Of flesh and air.

Bonnie and Josie are released in the expression of their celebration.

It would be just as impossible for them to remain quiet as they cance, as it would be for a modern child to hold his body still as he chanted a nursery rhyme. The expression and the movement are nearly impossible to separate.

"New Heaven and Earth," an essay by Joyce Carol Oates (1976), provides the following statement: "Instead of hiding our most amazing, mysterious, and inexplicable experiences, we will learn to articulate and share them...." Oates realizes that for the future to be successful and meaningful humans must communicate. It is the same with the sport experience. Sheehan (1978:89) stresses that we are in ". . . a time when we should be trying to communicate
with each other. Explaining man to man. Explaining those of us who are really into sports to those who are not."

Several authors have attested to this responsibility and desire to share a peak movement experience. Fraleigh (1970:68) states, "After it is gone we may savor the experience in words." The expression is a way to "savor" or prolong the perfect moment. According to Beiswanger (1973:10), "Applause turns to praise and the urge to put into words what the joy is about." Whorf (1956:155) stresses the idea that it is important to communicate: "It would seem as if kinesthesia, or the sensing of muscular movement, though arising before language, should be made more highly conscious [italics not in original] by linguistic use of imaginary space and metaphorical images of motion." According to Fast (1970), body language and spoken language should complement one another. The first sub-four-minute miler, Roger Bannister, whom Kuntz (1974) refers to as a great mystical poetic philosopher of sport, felt unqualified to express his feelings about running; but he also wanted to be "...helpful to others who may have experienced these same emotions but are not prepared to talk, let alone write, about them (Bannister, 1963:14)."

It is not the purpose of this paper to thoroughly investigate the many and varied purposes behind the expressions of sport experiences. It is enough to say that man has a need and a desire to communicate what he experiences in sport. "For now, " according
to G. Leonard (1975:43), "there is only the language of the arts--of music and dance and poetry--to remind us of what we know but cannot say about the athletic experience."

This brings the author to a look at language and arts as man's means of expression. However, these entities have a visible connecting link--poetry. Kleinman (1968) stresses the need for a method to express sport that is "experiential," rather than logical and "closed." He suggests to a reader knowledgeable in the nature of poetry that poetry would be an excellent way to achieve an understanding of the true nature of sport. The reader would be given a view of an on-going act, and his appreciation and sensitivity would be enhanced through the revelation.

Language Is Expression

As has been demonstrated, man's ability to think and express his thoughts is one of the things that separates him from the other members of the animal kingdom. As he strives to sort his thoughts and express them to a fellow human, he uses words, verbal symbols. Thus he expresses the meaning(s) his thoughts have for him, and as he expresses himself, the thoughts and the meanings change within him. He may then strive to find an alternate manner of expression, but according to Eller (1962), words remain his most familiar and common medium of expression. As man's ideas evolve, they must be expressed to become reality. A thought or an idea is not an actuality until it is expressed. As Langer (1957) states, "By means of
language we can conceive the intangible, incorporeal things we call our ideas...." Language, which is comprised of words, is an astounding and well-developed device of symbolic representation. Through this type of representation, man can come to grasp the meanings in his environment, in his experiences, or in his movements. As Eagleton (1970:1) comments, "...It is in language that we conceal or express what we are." The following quote from Henri Bergson clearly states the importance of language:

Nothing is clear until we have put it into words, for words are the only means of translating impressions to the intellect. Hence the immense help expression gives to vision, in clarifying it. The growth of the power of language is not merely a technical development, it implies a growth of vision.

If the above statement is true, humans would be wise to improve their skill with language and thereby improve their vision, their perception, their understanding. Or, as Eagleton (1970:20) states, "...Language is the medium in which we live, think, feel and act."

Without language, human beings would be left with physical gestures and guttural responses to communicate their thoughts and to share life's experiences. Eagleton summarizes its importance: "Language is a way of carrying the world around with us...."

Art Is Expression

Man's efforts to express himself have also shaped the product he terms "art." Some authors reflect the idea that art has become man's highest form of expression, and even that man can only express the ultimate reality of living through art. H'Doubler (1976)
Feels that "art is the only medium man has for expressing and communicating values and meanings [italics not in original] found in everyday living experiences...." Langer (1950) concurs that art is the expression especially of human feelings and values, or the expression of the affective domain of human experience. Emphasizing that art has emotional rather than factual value, H'Doubler (1940:xxi) said, "Art cannot be divorced from life--it is of life's essence."

These authors feel that art is a necessary ingredient to experience a full and complete life. Centeno (1941:9) gives art a "glorious" position:

Art is a symbolic possession of life--and a possession so complete, yet so undisturbing to life's own rhythm, continuity and flux, that it is glorious for man to know that he can do it and that he must do it in order to live in all fullness.

Art is opportunity. Art is creation. Art is self-sufficient; it possesses its own rationale. Art attempts perfection. Art represents life. In Purposes of Art, Elsen (1967) broadens the scope of art as follows:

[Art]...affords the opportunity to celebrate the common or the uncommon, to be reverent or irreverent, to give expression to the rational or the sensual....Art provides an important record of the encounter of the human spirit with modern life.

**Poetry Is Expression**

According to Nims (1974), "Poetry is...the natural expression of our humanity." Poetry is art. Language is the material of poetry. For most poetry theorists, the poem is an expressive work of art that results from the manner in which the poet employs
words "...not only to say things, but to say them in certain ways (Langer, 1950:144-145)."

In her philosophical lecture-essay, "Poetic Creation," Langer (1950) spends time comparing poetry to other creative works of art, especially painting. She summarizes her assertions with the following statement:

...Poetry, like all art, is abstract and meaningful; it is organic and rhythmic, like music, and imaginal, like painting. It springs from the power of language to formulate the appearance of reality....

Poetry's unique position in the dual realms of language and art has elicited some rather startling statements from poets, poetry critics, and teachers concerning the nature of poetry and its value in society. According to the poet Shelley (1904), "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." It is a pleasure-filled expression beyond and above consciousness. Furthermore, poetry "awakens and enlarges the mind itself...[It] lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." Shelley refers to poetry as a refresher for the imagination, a strenghtener for man's moral nature. He describes his art with words such as "immortal," "divine," "lovely," and "exalting." As Shelley states, "A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight."

Ciardi (1975) describes a good poem with the phrase, "a sense of the whole language stirring." In good poetry the words and the way they work together, their sounds and rhythms, all make the
language seem alive and "stirring." It is different from the ordinary. At the same time the poem must "remain large enough to be all things to all who care to read." It is ambiguous by design so that people can see in the poem their own reflections. Ciardi refers to a poem as a "context for making choices"; in other words it actively forces involvement from the reader. He summarizes his description of poetry by stressing that "no poem means anything that any paraphrase is capable of saying."

Wheelock (1963) also stresses that true poetry cannot be translated or paraphrased. He agrees with Langer (1950) that the poem is affective and brings what was inside the poet to the outside—"a poem is a way of knowing and feeling...." Wheelock (1963) demonstrates that the poet attempts to share his inner knowledge by "giving form to the formless," by "giving a body to the bodiless essence of things," and by trying "to say the unsayable, to suggest by rhythm, cadence and structure what cannot be put into words...."

According to Wheelock, poems, as well as any great works of art, should unite and delight man. They should be enjoyable, because some meaning escapes analysis and thus "...is experienced unconsciously through enjoyment." Enjoyment can bring understanding and knowledge. "The kind of knowledge a poem offers us is a renewed awareness, a vicarious re-experience of the world in all its sensory and emotional impact."

Read (1957) feels that poetry has a "transcendental quality," which is just as difficult to define as a state of grace. He
expects poetry to rise above the mundane language of everyday living through its vision, action, and imagery. Both surprising and inevitable, poetry should be an adventure of sense and sound that carries the reader into new realms of understanding and enjoyment. It should suggest the infinite possibilities of the universe within each of us.

Sheehan (1978), a medical doctor, runner, and author, compares a poem to a direct gaze into another person's eyes: "Poetry is only putting into words of what my eyes and yours have said."

Poetry is a complicated form of linguistic and artistic expression. As Nims (1974) states, "Poetry consists not so much in saying memorable things as in saying things memorably." Because of the poet's expression, the reader is somehow brought closer to the actuality as he knows it. His memory becomes clearer through the poet's phrasing. According to Nims, "...Poetry, in a phrase of Ezra Pound, ought to be 'news that stays news.'" Poetry doesn't wear out. Readers can share in a poem's expression without necessarily believing in its ideas. Poetry gives us an emotional expression, but also "...affects sensitive readers in a physical way."

Poetry Is Experience

Poetry uses words. Since every word is a physical experience, poetry automatically includes bodily involvement. Ciardi (1975:103) points out that "...the act of producing a word involves breath and muscle, and various kinds of muscular activity tend to produce
various kinds of feeling." Therefore, the physical experience becomes part of a word's personality. Nims (1974:177) alludes to the same idea when he says, "We can think of words as having not only a mind--their meaning--but also a body--the structure of sound in which their meaning lives." At times the muscular involvement in a word or phrase is more important than its precise meaning. This muscularity lends emotional involvement. As Ciardi (1975:114) phrased the idea, "...Good language involves the body; the more powerful and the more simple its emotion, the greater the bodily involvement is likely to be [italics in original]."

Burnshaw (1970) refers to words as biology, as physical events. He feels that this fact is obvious, but it has been taken for granted and ignored by all but the poets. In poetry there is a touch--an experience--of words for the reader.

In New Voices in American Poetry (Evans, 1973), Coleman Barks states that "...some poems travel through the body and seem to require a physical response." He says that these poems call his sense of his own body to move and try to understand. He attempts to require bodily responses from the readers of his poems. Barks states, "...Kinesthetic energy is essential to poetry...."

Read (1967:39), a poet and critic, admits that writing is physical and that there is an "...intimate connection that undoubt-ly exists between the physical activity and the verbal style." Nims (1974) states, "The poem does not come just from a mind; it comes from a mind in, and very aware of, a body."
Unity of Body and Mind

Even though the above statements are true, poetry is often considered strictly an activity of the mind that has no possible connection with bodily movement. G. Leonard (1975:169) opposes this idea when he observes, "The body is always involved, even in what we call the most cerebral pursuit. Einstein tells us that the Special or Restricted Theory of Relativity came from a feeling in his muscles." Metheny (1968:14-15) alludes to the same idea when she describes Newton's discovery of gravity by saying, "At the moment of initial insight, he did not know what he was thinking about; he knew only that he was vaguely disturbed by something he could not identify." This inner disturbance may be called the first stage of an idea or an emotion; random physical movements, such as tapping a pencil or kicking a stone, which illustrate a desire for expression, are second; the third stage occurs when the idea or emotional state is formulated into words. Or as Metheny (1968:22) explains, movement is the link between the "feeling" of an idea and its statement for public display.

According to Fraleigh (1968), the body makes communication possible. Or, in the words of Rugg (1963:98), "Nothing is more basic than the role of the body. We not only move with it, we think with it, feel with it, imagine with it." Eller (1962) refers to movement as outward expression of inward impression. According to Metheny (1968:102), "As Socrates thought about these things many centuries ago, he recognized that men must move in order to understand
themselves." By moving, man attempts to find the significance and meaning of his own human identity. The movement experience unites the feelings of the body with the thoughts of the mind.

In the viewpoint of Rugg (1963:61), "...The traditional dichotomy between 'body' and 'mind' must be undercut...." This conflict between body and mind has become deeply ingrained in portions of our Western culture. It is the source of both intellectual snobbery and anti-intellectualism. The dichotomy also clearly contradicts the Greek concept of unity of body and mind. If man fails to "undercut" this tradition of separateness, he will continue to overlook half of his life's experiences. According to Sheehan (1978:84), "...The body and the mind are indissolubly one." The body and mind are united with our emotional state, as well. H'Doubler (1940:117) states, "It is difficult to imagine any emotion that is not connected with feelings of bodily and motor sensations. Every feeling state has its motor phase, which is attendant upon physical as well as mental feeling." Gellhorn (1964) illustrates that inner attitude, or mood, may be induced through the posture and actions of the body--there is a direct relationship. Rugg (1963) points out that our response to external stimuli and our changes in emotional set are both demonstrated by a physical or muscular adjustment.

The body and mind are inseparable. It is impossible to determine where a physical feeling ends and a conscious thought begins. In fact, perhaps feelings are impossible without a mind, and thoughts are not possible without muscular activity. Eller
(1962:14) refers to thinking as "...an extension of the forms and functions of muscular activity." Without body and mind working together, man lacks appreciation of art. Mitchell (1974:122) states, "Through inclusion of sensuous feelings of the body into consciousness man has beauty within his mind." Man's creativity is a function of body and mind united. In the words of Rugg (1963:97), "Every creative human response is the act of a whole person....The whole man creates."

Poetry is not strictly an intellectual expression. It is also connected with the body; it is physical and experiential. The basis of a poem is experience; the poem is an experience. Nims (1974) compares the way the elements of a poem work together for one effect to the unity of body and mind which gives the total experience of life.

All the above ideas serve to point out that poetry is out of the ordinary. It is language; it is art. It is life. "Since poetry is an expression of our human experience, there is no aspect of that experience which is not relevant to it (Nims, 1974:xvii)."

**Sport and Poetry**

Sport and poetry are both expression and experience. Sport and poetry belong together. Both may be expected to provide a glimpse into life itself. Both are highly personal. Both evoke feelings of freedom, imagination, self-expression, dedication, and community.
As Miller and Russell (1971:102) state, "Perhaps more significant than the fact that poets write of sport is the fact that some poets have found in sport a subtle link with the art of poetry."

They continue the thought by quoting James Dickey, poet and National Book Award winner, who said, "I think a track meet is as poetic as anything you can get."

Glaser, in New Voices in American Poetry (Evans, 1973), adheres to the concept that poetry is a game, a game of words at play. This refers to several characteristics that poetry and sport share: playfulness, a combination of skill and chance, and the effort to win. The poet "wins" when he uses a combination of words and phrases that make something exciting and significant of a poem. Morrison (1965:vii) sees sports and poetry as being inextricably related in these ways:

There is an affinity between sports and poetry. Each is a form of play; each is a form of ritual. Each has the power to take us out of ourselves and at times to lift us above ourselves. They go together naturally wherever there is zest for life. The ancient Greeks, with their great athletic festivals provided over by the Muses, exalted both. And Robert Frost once said, "I go so far as to connect all of the sports with poetry."

Lewis (1973:1) indicates that both sport and poetry are reflections of what "...society holds to be most true, most valuable, and most worthy." He points out further similarities between sport and literature (which includes poetry): both encourage creation, both of them call forth the full range of human emotion, both require self-examination and self-evaluation, and both are available to anyone who wishes to seek them out and experience them.
Both sport and poetry have a craft and involve manipulation. The athlete manipulates various implements and/or his body. The poet manipulates words. According to Welch (1977), in sports and in poetry there is an intensity and desire to raise stature (improve one's self), submit to the rules of the game, and create tension. Both poets and athletes require workouts and practice to succeed. Welch adds that both depend on their bodies and their physical condition, as well as their competitive attitude (desire to succeed) and confidence. Welch feels that the athlete's play on the field is a counterpart of physical and imaginative momentum in poetry.

Sheehan (1978) portrays a distinct relationship between the athlete and poet, and in fact, refers to the two in the same sentence a dozen times within the space of a few pages in his book *Running and Being*. When he takes to the roads as a runner, he is seeking "the vision of the poet," as he asks questions about life and existence and himself. He states that the distance runner is like the poet: "...He sees himself as a question to himself. And seeks the answer by seeking to be, by creating himself." Sheehan compares his personal thoughts and expression of his running to the way Emerson felt about his poetry. His final comparison of the athlete and poet refers to the idea that sport condenses and compresses the "emotions of a lifetime" into a microcosm so that the athlete experiences "everyday existence" in a way that is elsewhere only evident to the artist, especially the poet.
Gallwey (1974), tennis professional and author, feels that great poetry and "peak experiences" in sports are similar because they are born in silence and "the quiet depths of the unconscious." Neither one can occur until cognitive processes have been transcended and the mind and body are simply still. The "unconscious" then has control—the only way body and mind are truly united in Gallwey's opinion.

Several authors have seen the similarities between sport and poetry. Slusher (1967:106) turns to a poem by Rilke to summarize what he is attempting to say about sport and existence. Metheny favors the poems of Wallace Stevens to assist in her attempts to describe what movement means to man. She uses portions of many of his poems in her book Movement and Meaning and certain lines from his poems in several of her other books and articles. One of her favorite portions is from "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly": "A moving part of motion,/ A discovery,/ Part of a discovery.../ Too much like thinking to be less than thought." Metheny (1965:15) feels that Stevens has provided an extremely "lucid description of what movement means to man."

Finally one must consider the cliche, "poetry in/of motion." According to Whorf (1956:155), "Our sports are strongly imbued with this element of the 'poetry of motion.'" Exactly what this means is difficult to determine. Smith (1955:49) helped to define the phrase when he used it to describe the running style of Lovelock, the 1936 Olympic 1500-meter champion:
To those who had the privilege of watching him, there was sheer wizardry in his running; something almost superhuman in the perfect co-ordination of his every movement, the apparent absence of strain, and the lyrical flow of his style and rhythm. Here, indeed, was poetry in motion.

Smith, in referring to another world-class runner, Landy, uses the phrase, "...poetry of his running action." From these descriptions one infers that "poetry in motion" describes the smooth, flowing, rhythmical, effortless, co-ordinated, natural, powerful, and precise movement of an athlete in action. (Today's slow motion video play-back has aided the image.) But the above adjectives used to describe movement are also used in discussions of poetry; therefore, it seems that sports and poetry are closely related in yet another way--their vocabularies.

Sport and poetry are related to the whole person. They are experience and expression. Yet, sports-minded persons have a desire to verbalize their peak experiences in sports. Poetry is a physical experience that verbally brings one closer to the actuality of the original event or experience. Sport and poetry share many similarities. They belong together in a mysterious way:

[Sport]...needs expression and it needs the kind of expression which can retain the mystery of the experience without reducing it to a banal objectified conception. It is the poet who can best express this experience through the word and through the word establish it, that is, give it a permanence, but a permanence which is neither absolutized nor objectified and which retains the mystery of experience [italics not in original].

Poetry plunges us into the mystery (L. Leonard, 1975:141).
CHAPTER III

THE LANGUAGE OF SPORT AND POETRY

Sport and poetry, two areas of cultural interest which are usually seen as unrelated, have many similarities. As Lowe (1977:27) observes, one way of identifying these similarities would be to "take terms which can be construed to elaborate both" and to define them within their contexts. Sport and poetry belong together because they share terminology.

The Language of Sport

According to Toyama (1971), sport and its language are interrelated. The spectator is also dependent on the language of sport to help him internalize the experience he is sharing. Toyama feels that specific sports have a specific language.

Beisser (1967:14) makes this statement concerning the language of sport:

The concepts of sports and their language are so familiar and pervasive that they are used to clarify by analogy other major aspects of American life. Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson have been referred to in the press as "quarterbacks" or "team captains."

Metheny (1965:84) observes that our language contains many metaphors that demonstrate similarity between human emotions and sports movements. For instance, when a person says, "I struck out," he may not literally have had three strikes in a ball game. He may only be describing a feeling of failure through the use of sport terminology.
Lowe (1977:168) theorizes that some of the common terms used to describe sport are "nondefinitive." He stresses that this does not mean they cannot be defined, but that they may have several meanings and the meanings may vary with context and reference. He states that these words, nevertheless, are useful for communication because of their cultural value and because we learn their meanings early in life. We use these words to convey ideas to one another. Such words give freedom of expression and are "culturally locatable, agreeable, and non-threatening." Among the more common of these terms are "rhythm," "flow," "gracefulness," and "form."

The Language of Poetry

Students of poetry are familiar with its terms. Many poetry anthologies contain glossaries which provide technical definitions of these terms. Additionally, poets themselves have developed a vocabulary which refers to various attributes of their craft. These words are found when poets speak or write concerning their creations or when critics explore these products. However, there is a difference between the language of poetry and the language of criticism of poetry. The language of poetry is the words that are used within the poem—the words that form the poem. The language of criticism is words that are used to describe the poem, to say things about the poem, or to comment on the way it has been written.

Ciardi (1975) makes several statements about the language of good poetry that is also relevant to a discussion of sports:
1. The language of good poetry is active. In general, this refers to the active voice of verbs. The poem should be a vigorous statement and at times can be weakened by the passive voice. This also refers to the muscularity of the words. "Muscular" words require a physical response from the reader. For example, the word "thrust" forces the speaker to perform the action that the word indicates. It makes one want to thrust one's head forward as it is pronounced. The relationship of "active" language with sport action is obvious. Vigorous activity demands active verbs, even in description. The human body in action is muscular and often elicits a muscular response from an involved observer. Electrodes placed on the spectator have demonstrated this fact. A performing athlete is an example of muscularity; proper description of his movements demands the active voice of verbs.

2. The language of good poetry is exact. Poets pay particular attention to details in their writing and in the life around them. A single word or mark of punctuation in a poem is of utmost importance. A poet's own observations give him the details to write. A flower, for example, is not simply a flower. It has a shape, color, fragrance, and life span all its own. Sports are exact by their very nature. Many events require marksmanship of some type, and football has often been called "the game of inches." Athletes in team sports generally take their clues for action from tiny details, such as the opponent's eyes, his physical stance, the position of his feet, or his center of gravity. A small detail, for instance a bent knee or
an unpointed toe, can make the difference between winning and losing for a gymnast. **Accuracy** is a special aspect of exactness. According to Weiss (1969:127), accuracy is "a willed arrival at a selected target. It is an achievement."  

3. The language of good poetry is true to its own **roots** and **distinctions**. Each word has a history and the poet must be aware of historical implications. Most words have connotations, which have a marked effect on the reader, as well as denotations. The poet helps to keep the language intact by his awareness of historical roots and distinctions between words that are similar in meanings. Organized sports have a rich heritage extending back to ancient Greece. The Olympic processional illustrates these roots and keeps the history of the games from disappearing. Toyama (1971) asserts that the language of each sport has maintained its own distinctions.

4. The language of good poetry echoes itself. In this statement, Ciardi is referring to **patterns**. Word, phrase, sound, or image patterns are important in a poem. **Repetition** is important if the pattern is to be stressed or have a pronounced effect. Patterns of movement--play patterns or pass patterns--are evident in many sports. Coaches of team sports often say, "If a play pattern is successful, repeat it. Don't overuse it, but make use of its effectiveness."
5. The language of good poetry tends to be "double language."
Here Ciardi is referring to ambiguity, implied meaning, and language that involves the imagination. Poets reflect the ambiguity that is a part of language because language is a human invention. Poets reflect the ambiguity of life. In this way a poem can "be all things to all who care to read." Poets use implications; they try to say little and make it mean much. Originality is of major importance. Saying something in a new and memorable manner is what poetry is all about. Poets avoid cliches and worn-out expressions. Sport has ambiguity. Individual movements, such as feints and fakes, are actively deviant. Athletes fake one shot and attempt another in efforts to outwit their opponents. Sport is often viewed as a micro-cosm of society and so is filled with implied meanings. It has symbolized death, sexuality, man's search for identity, and man's desire to live in a controlled situation. Sport may be seen from many viewpoints: a religion, a big business, a political device, an instrument of international politics, or a social science. For example, some individuals no longer consider sport a game, but a religion; for some it may have become a way to get rich. Sport is imaginative. Inventive plays, game plans, and ideas for success will always have a place in the world of sports. Those who refuse to try new things seem to be left behind. Gymnastic routines are even judged on originality. The "magic" of some individual athletes' moves is actually their creative response to a given situation.
6. The language of good poetry is **precise** and **controlled**. The poet must choose his adjectives wisely or they soon become a weakness of the poem. The poet desires an exact portrayal, and he must exercise control over himself and his writing to be successful. If he becomes too emotionally involved, he loses objectivity in his descriptions, and the reader's interest lags. Poets are the individuals who are most in control of language. Precision is important in sports as well. For a skilled athlete, precision means speed with control. In ball-type sports one refers to ball control, in gymnastics it is body control, and in hitting or hurling events implement control is important. The athlete must limit his emotional involvement; a lack of control is a serious weakness for an athlete.

7. The language of good poetry must be felt deeply. The good poem will never wholly submit to explanation, just as the peak experience in sports is difficult to explain. Sports involvement is an experience that is felt deeply by many.

These statements concerning the language of good poetry summarize some of the similarities shared by poetry and sports. The following terms (underscored in the text), which elaborate both, were delineated in the above discussion: "active," "exact," "patterns," "precise," "muscularity," "details," "accuracy," "distinctions," "repetition," "originality," and "control." The discussion now progresses to some specific terms that are shared by poetry and sport.
"Rhythm" is probably the first word that comes to mind when one compares sport and poetry terminology. According to Nims (1974:243), biologists are aware of at least a dozen human rhythmical cycles. The heartbeat might be our original source of rhythm. Nims adds that "even before we were born, consciousness may have come to us as an awareness of rhythm...." In addition, when one considers the rhythms of nature, it is no wonder that rhythm fascinates man. Although rhythm is difficult to define, most theorists would agree with Nims that "...it is some kind of pattern of recurrence: something happens with such regularity that we can anticipate its return and move our body in time with it."

Metheny (1968) refers to rhythm as an important concept of movement. Action develops a feeling for rhythm. Weiss (1969) states that each sport participant exhibits a rhythm of his own. This may demonstrate the connection with the body's rhythmical cycles. Lowe (1977:181) refers to rhythm in a game situation as "an unbroken cadence in the play."

In the poetic sense, Langer (1957:51) stresses that "a rhythmic pattern arises whenever the completion of one distinct event appears as the beginning of another." The implication is that rhythm can be considered to consist of waves. Ciardi (1975) calls rhythm a variation of intensity. It is a regular surge of "more" and "less." Wheelock (1963) suggests that words and rhythm work together in a poem to become an experience. Nims (1974:243)
summarizes the relationship of rhythm in the dual realms of sport and poetry: "Through rhythm...man unites himself with the ecstasy and terror of a moving universe." Rhythm is an important link between poetry and sport.

Form

Sports are at times described as "order in the midst of chaos." Games have rules that must be applied in order to maintain order. Without rules, games are impossible. The body of rules and the pattern of organization in a sport give it structure. Poetry has certain rules of form that must be recognized and which give order to the poem. The arrangement of the sections of a poem give it a structural pattern. Repetition, or patterning, can be an important aspect of the form. In poetry, form generally applies at least partially to the appearance of the poem. The physical appearance is important and is sometimes part of its message. The "closed" form of a sonnet might be comparable to the structure of a team sport such as football. The "open" form of free verse relates more to individual sports.

Free verse works with some of the established meters and rhymes of traditional verse, but combines them in new variations. In order to achieve emphasis, free verse has its own kinds of patterns to work with and against. For example, a poet can establish a pattern of formal, classic language and then create emphasis by startling the reader with something informal. Barry Targan uses this kind of contrast as he begins his poem "High Fungoes":

I am hitting fungoes to my sons,  
lazy loops into September's afternoon.  

Hit me a popper dad.  

Individual sports employ the classic moves of team sports, but the athlete is freer to create his own tensions. In racquetball, for example, he may set a pattern with the traditional smashes and then overcome his opponent with a contrasting soft shot.  

In sports, form also applies to an athlete's body control and efficiency of movement. Athletes in jumping or hurling events spend hours practicing their form, improving through repetition to maximize the results of their efforts.  

Flow  

In sport, flow denotes a line of movement. It is especially noticeable in team sports such as football or basketball when a play pattern moves all the players in the same direction. Flow in a poem, too, denotes line of movement. This poetic flow may move the reader to a visual, physical, emotional, or mental climax.  

When an individual athlete's movements are described as flowing, the connotation gives one the image of graceful, smooth, and effortless motion. Flow is derived from dynamic form, so that slow-motion replays appear to demonstrate flowing movement. At times, exaggerated motions aid the appearance of flow. Specific lines of poetry that seem as smooth as a flowing liquid aid the image of gracefulness and effortlessness associated with flow; for example,
"I move, shining, over dim hills," a line from Grace Butcher's poem, "Runner at Twilight."

**Grace and Economy**

According to Weiss (1969:127), gracefulness is a quality adorning smooth, harmonious movement. Lowe (1977:179) adds that grace implies perfection of controlled, physical behavior. This quality in an athlete is greatly appreciated by spectators and at times nearly mesmerizes them. The same quality in poetry affects the reader similarly. The charm and fitness of certain lines give them an air of gracefulness. For example, in "Skier," a poem by Robert Francis, the skier is described as follows: "He swings down like the flourish of a pen."

**Skill** sets an athlete or poet apart. As Weiss (1969:127) suggests, skill is the acquired ability to accomplish an act with minimal waste and delay. Normally the lower skilled athlete does not appear graceful or effortless. His hard work is easily visible. The same is true in poetry. The more skillfully a poem has been worked, the more grace and effortlessness it demonstrates. It is ironic that effortlessness requires such a great deal of hard work to achieve.

Poets desire to make a little say much. They trim away all excess. Athletes work for economy of movement to conserve their energy. The poet economizes words. When Carl Sandburg says the cheerleader "throws himself into alphabetical shapes," he has described all the cheerleader's actions in a few words.
Harmony and Smoothness

As Lowe (1977:175) theorizes, harmony involves sequencing parts in a smooth manner to bring about a satisfactory, artistic whole. Perfect harmony reflects the beauty of simplicity. All the separate aspects of an action must come to full agreement for harmony to be present. Harmony is a pleasing arrangement in sports or poetry, just as it is in music. The various elements of a poem, when smoothly and artistically arranged, give it a feeling of harmony—working together.

Smoothness refers to the evenness of movement. Smoothness and harmony are necessary for graceful movement. A skilled runner's action is quite often described as smooth if it lacks wasted, jerky motions. In poetry, smoothness is accomplished through the word sounds and the meter. An example is found in "Dream Variations" by Langston Hughes: "To fling my arms wide/ In some place of the sun,/ To whirl and to dance/ Till the white day is done."

Power

Power speaks of potential energy, work accomplished, or a dynamic vitality. Power is might, but it requires control. Abundant energy is not powerful until it is placed under control so it can be directed. Gymnasts are excellent examples of power in sports. They employ great power to perform the graceful, well-balanced, well-controlled movements of their routines. A poem that is vital and energetic, that seems to have a great deal of potential, is termed "powerful." Certain lines of poetry cause a great impact
because of their controlled energy; for example, "and down we go singing with screams" from "The Bee" by James Dickey.

**Style**

Overall excellence and skill in a performance imply style. According to Read (1967:38), style is a mental discipline and a combination of an athlete's anatomy and his grace. Since anatomy is individualistic, so is style, as in the cliche, "His style is all his own." A runner may move his arms in a distinctive way, a jumper may use a particular approach, or a hockey player may hold his stick in a specific manner; each is a specific and distinctive style if the athlete is graceful and skillful. The style of a poet is displayed in his mode and form of writing. He may display his skill and discipline through some particular, distinctive, characteristic method of his own. He may write all his poems in a specific dialect. Perhaps he uses no punctuation or capital letters. His style may be the ballad, or he may write only lyric poems. The poet's style is formed by his skill and his own unique talent.

**Accent and Cadence**

Accent and cadence are poetic terms. Many coaches and athletes also use these words in reference to their sport or activity. Accent is a recurring stress in measured poetry. An athlete places added emphasis on certain moves whenever they occur; for example, the final step in the approach of a high jumper, the final step for a basketball lay-up, and the follow-through, which is accented in many
sports. Teams accent aspects of a game which they consider to be their strengths. In football, a team may have a skilled running back and so it will accent the running game.

Cadence is the rhythm or rhythmic progression of a poem. Many sport activities involve a rhythmic progression: the hurdler sprinting his race, the gymnast on the uneven bars or the floor exercise mat, the approach of a pole vaulter or long jumper, the players contacting the ball in volleyball, and a team's passing game in football or basketball. All of these actions have a cadence. In some it is very regular (hurdler) and in some the rhythm is uneven (volleyball).

The following terms have been given only a short explanation to aid clarity; they are not fully developed. These words (listed alphabetically) are only a sample of the vocabulary that is shared by poetry and sport. There are many more terms that could be considered; but this list, together with those words discussed more fully above, should amply illustrate that sports and poetry belong together because of their shared vocabulary.

Acceleration. Quickly increasing the speed of the body or its parts is important in most team sports. In individual events such as the discus, shot put, or javelin, acceleration of an implement is the goal. In poetry, more unstressed syllables brought together speed a line so the poet can skillfully avoid inertia and add variety to his work. William Stafford sets the scene for a line
of acceleration in his poem, "Traveling Through the Dark." The traveler found the body of a pregnant doe on a narrow, dangerous road. He knew her body presented an obstacle that could cause a serious accident. However, because the fawn was still alive within her, he physically and mentally hesitated; "then pushed her over the edge into the river."

**Aloneness.** Images in a poem develop an experience of aloneness because they do not require readers to look at them in an identical manner. The poet is alone in the creation of his poem, and each reader experiences that poem in solitary. Sports give man a unique opportunity to experience himself, as he is, alone. There is no greater pressure than to be alone in a demanding situation. A fitting example is the place kicker in football who can win the game with a last second field goal, or the basketball player alone at the free throw line when time has run out. Poetry helps one experience a similar "aloneness."

**Asserting.** The poet asserts himself over language and experience through the craft of poetry. In sports, an athlete tries to assert himself over his opponents, the elements, or implements.

**Balance.** A state of balance is a position of equilibrium and harmony. The balance of individual athletes is affected by the movement of body parts in relation to the center of gravity. A "balanced attack" in football refers to an equal emphasis on running and passing. Too much emphasis in one direction means a loss of balance. The poet, also, needs to avoid too much of one thing. In a skillful,
well-balanced poem the various elements equalize or harmonize to aid its effectiveness. On the other hand, overuse of alliteration, for example, makes a poem vulgar. Balance is best described by Robert Francis in "Two Wrestlers": "...face to face and grace/ To grace/ Balanced almost beyond balance...."

Celebration. Both sports and poetry celebrate life through their vitality, their energy. The celebration--the poem or the peak sport experience--is what the joy and jubilation is about. Triumph through struggle gives the poet or athlete a reason for festivity.

Choices. A good poem is a "context for making choices." The poet makes decisions as he writes the poem. The reader is forced to choose his interpretation and level of involvement as he internalizes the poet's choices. The athlete makes many spontaneous decisions as he competes--should he cut left or right, accelerate, or attempt a fake. Each situation presents its own choices. The sports-minded person, too, must choose his interpretation of sports and his individual level of involvement.

Contrast. Sports are filled with contrasts: fast or slow, graceful or lumbering, smooth or jolting, steady or explosive. Poems, too, use contrast to add variety and interest, and to make definitive statements. A line of poetry that contains contrast is James Wright's "All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home [italics not in original]," from "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio." Contrast and balance work together. Balance equalizes differing elements and contrast allows emphasis where it is needed.
Deliberate. A basketball player unhurriedly attempting a free throw is being deliberate. The football coach who carefully considers and decides to try for a first down rather than to punt has made a deliberate choice. The poet makes a deliberate choice of each word and phrase. His careful thought and consideration is illustrated by the many drafts that his work moves through. The poet and the athlete want to get it right.

Discipline. A poet or an athlete who lacks discipline will have a difficult time progressing in his field. Self-control is a necessity for both.

Drama. Because of the conflict involved in most sports, they are inherently dramatic. Poetry, too, is dramatic in nature. Many poets stress the drama by stressing conflict, dramatic action. Both sports and poetry have a sense of the inevitable--once a climax has been reached the outcome cannot be changed. The difference in the two types of drama is that the poet contrives his drama to fit his own goals, while in sports the conflict is variable and may have unexpected outcomes. However, in both cases there is resolved tension. An example of a dramatic situation in sports is an attempt for the first down in football. The fourth down play is so crucial to both teams that the tension is extremely high. The completion of the play resolves this one conflict within the larger setting of the game. A poem with dramatic action is "The Bee" by James Dickey. The author's small son is led by a bee into a dangerous position.
near a California freeway. The author resolves the tension when he rescues his son. As he moves he recalls the encouragement and direction of his old football coaches.

**Explosive.** Jumpers are encouraged by their coaches to explode upwards. Explosive action indicates a sudden release of energy. The action of certain running backs is described as explosive. In poetry, certain lines or words "explode" into a reader's consciousness and bring him closer to the experience. For example, the closing line of "The Base Stealer" by Robert Francis ends with an explosion: "Delicate, delicate, delicate, delicate--now!"

**Flexibility.** As Weiss (1969:96) states, "Flexibility is the capacity to meet new demands. It is of obvious importance in those sports where new challenges are constantly faced." Each new situation an athlete faces demands its own unique answer. Flexibility allows creativity to work for the poet and the athlete. The poet must face each poem he writes as an entirely new challenge. He cannot limit himself to only one form, meter, or pattern. He must write of each experience in its own unique way.

**Follow-through.** A movement is neither complete nor successful if it fails to follow through to completion. A good pitcher has a good follow-through. The same is true for a poem. For example, in the poem "The Fish," Elizabeth Bishop describes in detail the experience of catching a glorious fish. He is very large and is a real super catch. She provides the reader with an outstanding description of the eyes and coloring of the fish. She then uses the following,
one-line follow-through: "And I let the fish go." The victory of the poem and in the poem is the "letting go." Without its last line the poem is neither complete nor successful.

**Force.** As Lowe (1977:177) observes, "There is a thrust, an implied tilt, a power of expression in the still photograph of moving action which relays information tapping into our experience of muscular force and control. We know that muscles exert power and force...."

Words, too, have a power and force that must be recognized. Certain phrases have a "thrust," a "power of expression," that is analogous to physical strength or force. One such phrase is from A. E. Housman's poem, "To an Athlete Dying Young." Referring to the fleeting popularity of a young athlete, he states, "And the name died before the man."

**Immediacy.** Events in sports have a suddenness that forces instantaneous decision-making. Action becomes urgent. In a poem, immediacy is brought about by its impact. The poet forces the reader into the now of his poem. Walt Whitman helps the reader visualize "the well-train'd runner" in his short poem, "The Runner." He says, "He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs,/ He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs." The present tense verbs add immediacy.

**Impact.** Many poets want their message to have an effect on the reader. They long for something they have said to have an impact so that the reader will recall the words. Therefore, they give certain words or phrases emphasis. One method of creating emphasis or impact is to isolate a single word as James Dickey ends his poem "In the Pocket" with the single word "now." Sports have an impact on
society. Such events as the World's Series and the Super Bowl are great occasions in the United States, and the Olympics have a worldwide effect. The broken records or outstanding performances are recalled for many years, as are memorable poems.

Inexplicable. Poets accept and try to put meanings to the inexplicable. Athletes deal with emotions and experiences they often feel are inexplicable. Both poets and athletes find difficulty explaining their compulsions—the hold their art forms have over them.

Intention. The poet and the athlete in action portray extreme singleness of purpose. They have one goal in mind. Activity without direction is wasted energy. In addition to the immediate goals, such as scoring a touchdown or finding the right word, the poet and athlete may share some higher purposes: desire for recognition, emotional fulfillment, application of perceived talent or sense of duty, sense of discovery, or joy found in conquering.

Intuition. To sense the rightness of something without having to be told is an important attribute for either athlete or poet. A poet may not be able to explain why he chose a significant word in a poem. His intuition compelled him to use it and told him it was right. A running back may not be able to explain why he cut a certain way, or a quarterback why he called a play when he did. The same intuition or sense is at work for the poet and the athlete.

Momentum. Listening to televised coverage of professional football games can be tedious because the broadcasters speak
continually of momentum—when a team seems to have everything going its way. Once this force is started it is difficult to stop. Its weight carries it forward. Poets recognize this snowball effect and employ it in their writing. An idea gains weight until it carries itself to fulfillment for a reader. An image gains force and its effect cannot be stopped.

**Moves.** According to Woodard (Evans and Woodard), "a good poem is usually dominated by one or several extraordinary moves, just as most games are dominated by what sports announcers call 'the big play.'" A punt returned for a touchdown may change the entire situation in a football game. A move like rearranging the normal subject-verb-object pattern of a sentence can effectively change the emphasis of a line of poetry and perhaps an entire poem. Walt Whitman does this in the first line of "The Runner": "On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner." This "move" dominates the entire poem.

**Pace.** A steady speed or rate of movement is called pace. Runners know that pace is extremely important in a race of longer distances. Pace in a poem has to do with its rhythmic beat and rate of movement, or meter.

**Playfulness.** Playfulness adds spontaneity and fun to a contest. Playfulness sets sports activity aside from work and makes them enjoyable. In a poem, playfulness gives light-heartedness to even a serious subject. Some poets play games with words. Both
sports and poetry have a sense of joy and an appreciation of the out-of-the-ordinary that are important for playfulness.

Risk. One aspect of sports that aids their popularity in today's society is the element of risk. Humans need risks. They are strengthened because they have been threatened. A poet risks himself through expression in his poem. One of the most fearful risks is that of rejection, which can occur in either sports or poetry. The freedom found in poetry and sports brings risks. Within a poem, the poet has many smaller risks. As he chooses his words, cadences, sounds, and images, he is taking calculated risks. He desires to choose the most effective and successful moves. In sports, coaches and athletes figure the odds and decide which risks are worthwhile. Football is an excellent example. With the score tied in the first quarter, most teams will punt with two yards to go on the fourth down. In the same situation in the latter part of the fourth quarter, the team that is behind will more usually attempt the first down—a calculated risk.

Self-discovery. Poetry and sports are arenas where an individual can learn who he is and what he is capable of becoming. Poetry and sports are experience, and experiencing is a key to self-discovery. When one learns to recognize one's strengths and compensate for one's weaknesses, he is well on the way to knowing his true self.

Senses. The physical senses are very important in sports and poetry. The athlete employs the senses of sight, hearing, and feeling, especially, to assist him in his muscular efforts. He learns to combine their use to his best advantage. The poet strives to sharpen
his senses and express them. According to Nims (1974:xxxiii), the poet asks, "How can we see sounds and hear colors?" In poetry the expression becomes so lucid that the individual senses are combined for an overall unique impression.

**Simplicity.** Many coaches feel that simple, clear, and direct strategy and plays are most effective, that complicated plans serve only to confuse one's own players. The same is true with poetry. Complicated forms, meters, or rhythms may serve only to confuse the reader. A simple statement is the clearest and can say much; for example, "The ball loved Flick." This direct statement from John Updike's "Ex-Basketball Player" tells the whole story of the young man's skill and "touch" with a basketball.

**Struggle.** For many athletes, winning does not matter as much as the contest or the struggle: matching wits, strength, and effort against a worthy opponent. For a poet, much of the joy of completing a poem is because of the struggle, the battle to make a worthy creation. A true athlete loves the struggle of competition; the true poet loves the struggle of writing.

**Tension.** Interplay between meter and rhythm adds tension to a poem. The structure, pattern, or phrasing also add to the tightness of poetry. Emotional and physical counteractions add tension to athletic competition. Lowe (1977:24) suggests that a feeling of tension is a central characteristic of play. Whenever there is effort to achieve an end, some strain or tension is involved.
**Timing.** A sense of timing, which includes rhythm, tells the poet where lines should break and stanzas should end. A sense of rhythmic timing aids the "strategy" of one opponent against another in sports. Timing gives an athlete a sense of coordination. Timing gives a good poem the feeling that it is working as a unit. Skilled performance (a double play) and poems of unique value (Shakespeare's sonnets) display a fine sense of timing.

**Unity.** According to Lowe (1977:171), unity is a situation of wholeness or totality; its presence is an aesthetic entity. Unity means absence of separation and a complete harmony between all component parts. It is similar to synthesis, which Wheelock (1963:80) says is the subduing of all the parts to make a united whole. Both sports and poetry synthesize the emotional, physical, and intellectual into a single unit. A quarterback who calls his own plays is an example of "wholeness" in sports. A poem that demonstrates great unity is Walt Whitman's "The Runner," which has already been referred to and is fully discussed in the next chapter.

Sport and poetry, although usually seen as unrelated, share similar principles. This is demonstrated by their shared terminologies. Some of the key words which demonstrate their common elements are "rhythm," "flow," "form," "patterns," "control," "gracefulness," and "style."

Although the listing is by no means complete, there are over seventy terms which have been underscored in this chapter. These
amply illustrate that sport and poetry are related through their vocabulary. The appendix contains an additional list of over sixty terms that may have further value in delineating the similarities of sport and poetry. Also, many of the above terms may prove even more effective with further development.

The language of good poetry shares distinctive similarities with sport. Not only are sport and poetry related as expression and experience, but also through their vocabulary. Sport and poetry belong together.
CHAPTER IV

THE POETRY OF SPORTS

This section examines the expressive qualities of specific, individual poems and their use in describing the sport experience. The writer chose ten poems on the basis of their literary worth, variety of structure, accuracy of expression, and the sport they represent. The poems that have been chosen are "physical poems." In other words, they are mainly participatory rather than of a spectator-type. This is so that the "physicality" of language would be well illustrated.

The analyses of the poems include: (1) Use of terminology; (2) Use of mechanics, such as rhythm, rhyme, verse structure, and points of emphasis; (3) Use of visual cues; and (4) Overall expression (whether or not the poems create a meaningful response).

The poems, authors, and the sports they represent are as follows:

(1) Track and Field--

- "The Sprinters" by Lee Murchison (Morrison, 1965:54),
- "The Runner" by Walt Whitman (Morrison, 1965:53),
- "Pole Vaulter" by David Allan Evans (Evans, 1973:76),
- "Javelin" by Grace Butcher (Chapin, 1976:147);

(2) Baseball--

- "The Double-Play" by Robert Wallace (Morrison, 1965:16),
- "The Base Stealer" by Robert Francis (Francis, 1967:7);
(3) Football--

✓ "In the Pocket" by James Dickey (Knudson and Ebert, 1971:42),

✓ "The Touchdown in Slow Motion" by David Allan Evans (Evans, 1976:35);

(4) Basketball--

✓ "I Try to Turn in My Jock" by David Hilton (Evans and Woodard: 40); and

(5) Swimming--

✓ "400-meter Freestyle" by Maxine W. Kuman (Morrison, 1965:60-61).
Track and Field

Competition in events of track and field has increased in recent years. This is because the sport is both a team activity and an individual competition. Also, the general population has acquired a renewed awareness of running as a factor of physical conditioning.

According to Chapin (1976:145), "the sporting act of racing against time is an especially useful metaphor for evoking the ancient carpe diem (seize the day) theme." Track and field events are poetic in appearance and in nature. Runners are often described by the cliche, "poetry in motion." The limits of time and distance challenge humankind and represent life's boundaries, as do the challenges of language and paper and pen for the poet. The track and field athlete grapples with the realities of gravity, inertia, aerodynamics, velocity, and transfer of motion. There are realities of life that must be either overcome or accepted. The poems about track and field that are presented here accurately and descriptively describe events, but they also "...defy subject matter and escape the bounds of a single meaning (Knudson and Ebert, 1971:4)." Emotionally and intellectually there is more to explore for the serious reader.
The Sprinters

1. The gun explodes them.
2. Pummeling, pistoning they fly
3. In time's face.
4. A go at the limit,
5. A terrible try
6. To smash the ticking glass,
7. Outpace the beat
8. That runs, that streaks away
9. Tireless, and faster than they.

10. Beside ourselves
11. (It is for us they run!)
12. We shout and pound the stands
13. For one to win
14. Loving him, whose hard
15. Grace-driven stride
16. Most mocks the clock
17. And almost breaks the bands
18. Which lock us in.

Lee Murchison
"The Sprinters" contains many key words. In line 1, "explodes" is very visual and has a muscular feel. In line 2, "pistoning" denotes a driving work force, machine-like. "Terrible," line 5, forces the reader to visualize the faces of the runners—the strain and pain that is all too evident. The phrase "ticking glass" refers to the stopwatch, but may also have a historical reference to the hourglass method of keeping time. Lines 14-15 contain an especially interesting phrase: "hard/Grace-driven stride." These seemingly contradictory words accurately express the driving, high-knee action of the sprinter which is graceful at the same time it is hard and full of thrust. "Mocks" in line 16 expresses the futility and ridiculous nature of the whole situation—trying to race time. In line 17, "almost" reminds one that "close doesn't count." "Breaks the bands" refers to the physical and emotional boundaries that hold man. In addition, it may be another historical reference to the practice of holding the sprinters back with bindings at the start.

The poem is in two stanzas. The first is in reference to the sprinters and uses third person pronouns such as "them" and "they." The second stanza moves to focus on first persons as spectators to the event. "Ourselves," "we," and "us" indicate the change. The two stanzas also differ in the use of end rhyme. The first has two different end rhymes, lines 2 and 5 and lines 8 and 9. In the second stanza, it is lines 3 and 8 and lines 4 and 9 that have
ending rhyme. Additionally, the end of the second line in each stanza spells a difference in attitude. Line 2 ends "they fly," and line 11 ends "they run!"

Murchison uses a great deal of assonance and alliteration in this poem where the sounds are important and effective. This increases the reader's participation in the poem; it becomes a physical experience, just as is the sprint race for those who participate or watch.

The repeated vowels are used in line 6--"smash" and "glass," line 11--"us" and "run," line 12--"shout" and "pound" and line 16--"mocks" and "clock." The vowel sounds of high frequency are common enough throughout the poem to increase excitement, but are not overwhelming and are alternated in a rhythmic sort of way with vowels of lower frequency.

Consonants, which give shape and energy to speech, are very predominant in "The Sprinters." The alliteration of line 2, using the plosive, "p," adds to the sense of sudden and explosive movement at the start of the race. Many other examples of alliteration are present, but one sound is never overdone or vulgarized. Examples are line 5--"terrible try," lines 8-9--"that...that/...than they," line 14--"him, whose hard," line 16-17--"Most mocks.../ And almost...," and line 17--"breaks the bands."

The poem's physical appearance may remind an imaginative reader of two heats in the 100-meter dash. The ending of the lines
on the right side of the page is the finish of the race with many of the runners (lines) "neck and neck."

It is difficult for one poem to describe an event and at the same time show how that event affects the spectators. "The Sprinters" allows one to be in the stands to watch the race, and at the same time to step back and look at the situation analytically. It provides a fusion of both viewpoints. Time is one of the most binding of the "bands/ Which lock us in." It is because man fears the passage of time that he can love the athlete who "most mocks the clock."

"The Sprinters" truly does represent an identifiable experience and response for the reader.
The Runner

On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner,
He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs,
He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs,
With lightly closed fists and arms partially rais'd.

Walt Whitman
Although only four lines in length, Walt Whitman's poem, "The Runner," accurately describes the long distance runner in action. The reader is given a detailed picture of the runner's movement, his dress and appearance, and the physical condition of his body. The poem itself is like the runner. It does not waste an ounce of energy; it is spare, and yet it contains so much more strength than one would believe possible at first glance. The poem also makes one question whether Whitman is referring only to a physical runner, or all who are running life's race successfully.

The poem begins with a prepositional phrase that provides setting. It is a flat area, so the runner is not laboring as he would be if running uphill. It is a road, so he is able to run smoothly without stumbling and looking down to find places to put his feet. The runner is "well-trained," so he is running effortlessly and gracefully as if he would never stop on that endless, flat road. The inversion of subject and verb in line one puts emphasis on the action, rather than the individual.

Lines two and three emphasize the runner himself. Some key words in line two are "lean," "sinewy," and "muscular." These words quickly bring to mind the slight runner's body, with hard muscles in the legs and the blood veins visible. Line three begins exactly the same as line two. Whitman's simple phrase "thinly clothed" allows the reader to quickly fill in his own vision of, say, shorts and netted tank shirt. The description of the runner's body position, "leans forward," demonstrates that he is moving along at a quick
pace, not just jogging in an upright position. It also shows excitement and expectancy.

Line four begins again with a prepositional phrase, as does line one. The concentration in the final line is on the arms and hands. All who have ever tried running know the importance of proper arm position and action to the running motion, and thus one-fourth of the poem is dedicated to the upper extremities. This line also makes the poem feel like it is ending in a raised-arm salute to the runner.

Even in such a short poem, words are repeated. This serves as patterning to link the lines, and yet stress the different values of the words by their use in the sentence and then position in the line. "Runs"—the key word—is in lines one and three. "Lean" is in line two as an adjective; "leans" in line three is a verb. "Clothed" in line three is extremely similar in sound to "closed" in a similar position in line four.

The first two lines of the poem are related because of the stress on the adjectives. Lines three and four put more emphasis on the adverbs, especially those ending in "-ly." Also, the length of line relates the lines in this fashion.

On the other hand, lines two and four are united by the rhyme structure. Lines one and three end with a similar word. Whitman is using patterning for emphasis.

An additional method of uniting different lines joins lines one and four and lines two and three. As noted above, the beginnings
of the lines function in this manner. Lines one and four also each contain a word that has been apostrophized to fit the rhythmic structure. Most important, the middle two lines are filled with high frequency vowel sounds which express exhilaration and vivacity. Lines one and four contain lower frequency sounds that seem more calming.

The alliteration of the "l" and "r" consonants throughout the poem (at least one in each line) serves to unite all four lines and communicate energy as well as symbolize in sound the flowing motion of the runner.

The punctuation demonstrates that the poem is a continuous thought that ends with the end of the poem. It is one gesture--a salute to the runner. The appearance of the poem also aids the idea of the poem being one gesture. The appearance is consistent like the pace of the runner. Glancing at the consonants at the beginning of each line, one is immediately reminded of the breathing sounds made by the runner as he steadily moves along. The poem looks and feels solid--"lean and sinewy."

"The Runner" contrasts well with "The Sprinters." The feel of the poems is different and so is the response. "The Runner" lacks the plosives used in "The Sprinters." The overall image in "The Runner" is not so much of excitement as of appreciation and awe.
Pole Vaulter

1 The approach to the bar
2 is everything
3 unless I have counted
4 my steps hit my markers
5 feel up to it I refuse
6 to follow through
7 I am committed to beginnings
8 or to nothing
9 planting the pole
10 at runway's end
11 jolts me
12 out of sprinting
13 I take off kicking in
14 and up my whole weight
15 trying the frailty
16 of fiberglass
17 never forcing myself
18 trusting it is right
19 to be taken to the end
20 of tension poised for
21 the powerful thrust to
22 fly me beyond expectation
23 near the peak
24 I roll my thighs inward
25 arch my back clearing
26 as much of the bar as I can
27 (knowing the best jump
28 can be cancelled
29 by a careless elbow)
30 and open my hands

David Allan Evans
There are many terms used in "Pole Vaulter" that were explored in the previous chapter: "approach"--line 1; "feel"--line 5; "follow through"--line 6; "forcing"--line 17; "tension"--line 20; and "thrust" and "powerful"--line 21.

There are words in the poem that have a specific impact on the reader. "Unless" in line 3 feels very heavy and at the same time indecisive. The contrast of the words "everything" and "nothing," lines 2 and 8, is startling and effective; it suggests the "all or none" idea. In line 15, "frailty" does an excellent job of reminding the reader of the appearance of the vaulting pole and also refers to tentative, unsure aspects of the activity. The pole seems too small to flex so far without breaking. "Trusting" in line 18 is almost in complete opposition to the idea of frailty. "Poised," line 20, accurately describes the vaulter's body as he is carried into the air. The simplicity of the words and idea in the last line aptly demonstrate that the jump is over. All that is left is for the athlete to return to earth.

The fact that the poem omits punctuation reinforces the continuous movement of the pole vaulter from start to finish. This also shows that the event can live on in the memory of the vaulter and the viewer. In effect, it has no end.

The line arrangement or breaks in lines 4, 5, 13, 14, 20, and 25 suggest slow-downs or pauses in the vaulter's movements, or may be for clarity, in lieu of the punctuation.
The consonants are very effectively used. In line 11, "jolts" physically suggests the abruptness related to the described action. In lines 18-20, the "t" consonants are plosives. They help describe the build-up and release of tension, as do the "p" plosives in lines 20-21. The sound aids in describing the explosiveness of the movements and the sound of the vaulter's footsteps.

Alliteration is abundant in the poem: lines 15-17--"fraility of fiberglass" and "forcing"; lines 18-20--"trusting.../ to be taken to.../ tension"; lines 20-21--"poised.../ powerful"; and lines 27-28--"can be cancelled.../ careless."

The parenthetical lines relate to a brief suspension at the peak of tension, before the conclusion. The separation of line 30 from the rest of the poem emphasizes conclusion; the finish of the act will inevitably result. There is a finality that this single line emphasizes. It represents the fear of letting go, not having any contact with earth. Also, since there is no punctuation, it is easier to realize that it is also the beginning of the athlete's fall and return to earth. The broad, open vowels of the final line relate to its sense of letting go.

The rhythm in "Pole Vaulter" is not wholly regular, just as the pole vaulter's movements would not keep a strict rhythm. There is, however, a predomination of the anapestic foot (ta-ta-DUM); for example, line 1, "to the BAR" or line 4, "hit my MARK-ers."

According to the author (Evans, 1973:79), "The anapest can most nearly approximate the rhythm, energy, and action of sports."
The physical appearance of the poem on the page is a visual cue to the appearance of vaulting, especially if viewed from above. It stimulates the reader to visualize the long, narrow runway of the vaulter, which concludes with a single object (the single line). For some, the single object may be the box where the vaulter plants his pole, or it may be the crossbar high on its supports. The empty spaces within the poem help one to see the footsteps of the vaulter as he strains forward. The two-line verse that begins the poem may for some be reminiscent of the two walking steps that most vaulters use to begin their run.

"Pole Vaulter" is an excellent, image-creating poem. The reader may never have experienced the thrill of vaulting (it must be just next to flying!), but he can share it through this poem. Anyone who has seen a vaulter make several runs, only to stop short of the bar and try again, can realize that "the approach...is everything." Any spectator who has seen a beautiful jump ruined by a small error just at the end realizes the importance of the "careless elbow." The poem can make one hold one's breath until it is finished, just as many spectators involuntarily suck in their breaths until the athlete's attempt to clear the bar is completed. The poem is specific, just as the event it describes. At the same time it is ambiguous, referring perhaps to other experiences of life. But then, sports are a reference to all of life, a "microcosm" of our society.
Javelin

1 He is the ultimate warrior,
2 with all the ancient killing
3 coiled beneath his ribs.
4 He threatens the earth;
5 the air splits along a silver seam.
6 Pinned to earth, ghosts die
7 to archetypal screaming.
8 The sun is fierce on his hair,
9 and there is the wild curve of his arm
10 against the sky.

Grace Butcher
It is interesting to note that Grace Butcher titled her poem "javelin," making the title refer to the instrument. A javelin is a slender metal or wooden pointed shaft thrown for distance in a track and field contest. The javelin in ancient history was a weapon, and the skill of throwing was a matter of defense, not of competition. "Javelin" contains many references to the historical use of the javelin; however, the overall image is extremely effective, as the reader is able to picture a young athlete on a beautiful sunny day as he lifts the javelin into the pure blue sky.

Even though the title of the poem is "Javelin," the first word is "he." Therefore, the poem may not be about the weapon, but about the athlete. The poem has no stanza divisions, but its four sentences divide it naturally into sections. The first sentence is a statement of being. It states what the athlete is in the light of the historical significance of his implement. It is for the reader to decide what he is warring against in today's world, with his ancient desires hidden deep in his chest.

The second sentence is a statement of action. Its two verbs are both action verbs. It begins like the first sentence, but that is the only similarity. This sentence is completed in two lines, each a complete thought of its own.

The third sentence, also of two lines, begins with a participial phrase rather than the direct subject-first manner of the first two sentences. Again, the sentence contains an action verb, and
there is a third verb form in the gerund, "screaming." The sentence is entirely action-oriented.

The fourth sentence is similar to the first because it consists of three lines and is a statement of fact. The difference is that the subjects are objects rather than "he," although the sentence directly describes the antecedent of the pronoun.

Many of the words used in the poem give one the feeling that the athlete is involved in a high-pitched battle of some type. Consider words such as "warrior," "killing," "threatens," "pinned," "screaming," "fierce," and "wild."

Two words especially refer to the historical roots of the implement. In line 2, "ancient" is a direct reference to the use of the javelin as a weapon; and in line 7, "archetypal" refers to the original pattern or model that was set by men dying from javelin or spear wounds.

Three words give evidence to the definite humanness of the athlete. They are "ribs"--line 3, "hair"--line 8, and "arm"--line 9. In his humanity, the athlete is doing battle against natural forces of this earth, such as gravity. The word "earth" is repeated in lines 4 and 6, "air" is in line 5, "sun" is in line 8, and "sky" is in line 10. These are simple, natural words that describe the setting and enemy of the javelin thrower and the javelin.

A beautiful image is presented in line 5. The "s" alliteration stresses and emphasizes the phrase: "the air splits along a
The javelin is that seam as it glides through space. The only direct reference to the thrower's technique is in line 9: "the wild curve of his arm."

Other examples of alliteration are lines 1-2--"warrior,/ with"; lines 2-3--"killing/ coiled"; and lines 9-10--"arm/ against."

The only obvious end rhyme is lines 6 and 10, "die" and "sky." Line 5, "seam" is a partial rhyme with line 7, "screaming." Elsewhere rhyme is set up within some lines by a repetition of vowel sounds, such as "sun" and "curve" in lines 8 and 9.

An alternate method of viewing the entire poem, which many may prefer, is that it is a personification--the javelin has human-like qualities. In that case, "he" refers to the javelin itself. Line 8 refers to the reflection of the sun on the javelin as it flashes through the air. The "wild curve" (line 9) is the curve of flight. "Ribs" in line 3 refers to the body of the weapon. If one prefers this interpretation, the title is no longer a puzzle, and the entire poem is a single image of the javelin in flight at a track and field contest.

The overall statement of the poem convinces one that the javelin and its thrower, or just the javelin itself, is one with the ancient forces of earth, sky, air, and sun. Yet it is "pinned to earth" and can never truly be released from the ancient forces.
Baseball

According to Chapin (1976:71), "Baseball is the most poetic sport, if the frequency of its occurrence as a subject for poets is to be a criterion." There are perhaps many reasons to explain the prevailing number of baseball poems. One is because of the position baseball has held for many years in the hearts and lives of Americans. Another reason is that most Americans have personal experiences with baseball to draw on. Either they have participated in competition at one level or another, or they have been spectators and fans at games. Very few people can avoid hearing or reading something about the World Series when it is in progress. Also, baseball has a pace. It is exciting. It is contemplative. It seems to proceed with a rhythmic, measured beat that draws the poet into its hypnosis. Perhaps the best way to explain it is to quote the first few lines of Marianne Moore's poem, "Baseball and Writing":

Fanaticism? No. Writing is exciting and baseball is like writing.
You can never tell with either how it will go or what you will do; generating excitement--
a fever in the victim--

The poets are doing their share to record baseball's glorious moments and to express baseball's grace, fluidity, power, style, and poise.
The Double-Play

1 In his sea lit
distance, the pitcher winding
like a clock about to chime comes down with

4 the ball, hit
sharply, under the artificial
banks of arc-lights, bounds like a vanishing string

7 over the green
to the shortstop magically
scoops to his right whirling above his invisible

10 shadows
in the dust redirects
its flight to the running poised second baseman

13 pirouettes
leaping, above the slide, to throw
from mid-air, across the tightened interval,

16 to the leaning-
out first baseman ends the dance
drawing it disappearing into his long brown glove

19 stretches. What
is too swift for deception
is final, lost, among the loosened figures

22 jogging off the field
( the pitcher walks ), casual
in the space where the poem has happened.

Robert Wallace
Chapin (1976:71) observes that Robert Wallace makes the connection between sport and poetry extremely strong in his precise evocation of the fluid beauty of the well-executed double play. The double play is one of baseball's most suspense-filled and expectant actions for the fans and something of precision and near-perfection for the players. It is beautiful to behold. It leaves an image in the recollection that cannot be satisfied with anything less than a repetition or a definition of the act. "The Double-Play" defines the experience so that it will mean more to the reader. He will not be left the same. It keeps the moment from being lost.

Each stanza of the poem has three lines, just as the traditional shortstop-to-second-base-to-first-base double play involves three defensive players and each inning has three outs. In each stanza the lines are arranged from short to long. This, too, is physically similar to the actual play, as it seems to the observer, at least. The shortstop has the ball a short time; he has a short throw. The second baseman has to tag the base, avoid the incoming runner, and throw to first. The final line represents the long throw to first. It seems to take forever until the umpire makes his call.

The poem is technically a move-by-move commentary on the execution of the play. Each stanza is concerned with a different aspect. The content of each stanza is as follows:

Stanza 1--The pitcher delivers.
Stanza 2--The ball is hit.
Stanza 3--The shortstop fields the ball and turns.
Stanza 4--The ball is thrown to the second baseman.
Stanza 5--The second baseman makes his moving throw.
Stanza 6--The first baseman ends the play.
Stanza 7--This is the summation; the players relax.
Stanza 8--The inning is completed.

The first sentence ends in the seventh stanza. This end punctuation illustrates the end of the action. The ensuing lines are a finale to the double play.

The first two stanzas each contain an interesting simile. In line 3, "like a clock about to chime" describes the motion of the pitcher's wind-up. Similes are used to make images clearer and more well-defined through comparison. In line 6, the ball's movement over the turf is "like a vanishing string." Slow exposure photography would indeed show the ball to be a "string." It is an excellent comparison.

The short line in each stanza seems to receive extra emphasis because it is so short. Also, there is some vowel repetition that gives the impression of rhyme or near-rhyme at the end of some of the lines, for example, line 1--"in his sea lit" and line 4--"the ball, hit" and line 7--"over the green" and line 16--"to the leaning--."

The poem is about an action, and action verbs are prevalent throughout. Consider the action that "bounds" in line 6 portrays. In line 9, "scoops" describes the shortstop's move to field the ball. Lines 11 and 12 contain a phrase that makes the reader envision the
quickness of the shortstop's play. He "redirects its flight." He doesn't arrest or catch the ball at all. He simply "redirects" it to a different target. Beautiful!

In line 13, the second baseman "pirouettes" with all the grace of a ballet dancer (the word connotes grace). There could be no better way to describe that full, whirling turn of the second baseman's body as he leaps and throws simultaneously.

In addition to the verbs, there are over fifteen verb forms which also aid the movement of the poem. The predominant type is the "-ing" participle, but there are also "-ed" participles and infinitives. The following words especially aid the imagery of the poem: line 6--"vanishing," line 9--"whirling," line 12--"running poised," line 15--"tightened," line 16-17--"leaning-/ out," line 18--"disappearing," line 21--"loosened," and line 20--"jogging."

Nearly every line of the poem contains a verb or verb form, as well-disciplined action dominates the poem.

"The Double-Play" does not contain a great deal of obvious alliteration. Lines 17-18 contain the best example: "dance/ drawing it disappearing...." Also, in the second stanza are found several words that begin with the plosive "b" sound which add to the picture of the sharply hit ball bouncing across the infield. The other consonant sounds are not as obvious, but are so skillfully placed that they sneak unawares upon the reader. The phrase, "long brown glove" (line 18), deserves special attention. The sounds of the words
and the physical acts required to form them forces the reader to slow down. The drawn-out sounds unconsciously extend the length of that first baseman's glove.

Wallace set his poem at night so the lights and "invisible shadows" could add to the magical quality of the whole performance and make it seem even more like a dance on stage than lines 13 and 17 hint. Yet, as the last line points out, the whole event took less time than it takes to read the poem. The double play that is described has been accomplished by professional ball players. One can know this because of the lighting system and field description, the skill of the players, and their casualness once the play is finished, especially the pitcher who walks from the field. The players have completed their task. The magic and grace of this near-perfect moment lives only in memories and in Wallace's poem.
The Base Stealer

1 Poised between going on and back, pulled
2 Both ways taut like a tightrope-walker,
3 Fingertips pointing the opposites,
4 Now bouncing tiptoe like a dropped ball
5 Or a kid skipping rope, come on, come on,
6 Running a scattering of steps sidewise,
7 How he teeters, skitters, tingles, teases,
8 Taunts them, hovers like an ecstatic bird,
9 He's only flirting, crowd him, crowd him,
10 Delicate, delicate, delicate, delicate—now!

Robert Francis
Robert Francis is an extremely talented poet. His sport poems are unique in their ability to express the mystery, beauty, poise, and action of sport events. Many of his lines are memorable because he has enunciated a familiar idea in a startling manner. The first stanza of his poem "Pitcher" is an excellent example (Francis, 1967:8): "His art is eccentricity, his aim/ How not to hit the mark he seems to aim at."

"The Base Stealer" presented here for analysis is one of Francis' most popular poems. It can be found in most anthologies of sports literature, as well as in other texts. Probably its two most popular lines are the first phrase, "Poised between going on and back," and the last line with its build-up and explosive "now!"

The entire poem is based on the actions of the base stealer before he makes his attempt. The single word "now!" summarizes his run. Because of the superb structuring of tension and excitement in the nine lines above, the expectancy and ultimate outburst in the tenth is all that is needed for the reader to envision the results for himself. It is almost as if the lines represent innings and the climactic action occurs in the tenth inning.

The entire poem is punctuated as one sentence to aid in presenting the basestealer's singleness of purpose, continuous motion, and the time frame of the single pitch. The reader is not shown the runner diving head-first back to base on a pick-off attempt. He is upright and ready to make the steal on this pitch.
The repeated phrases of lines 5 and 9 serve several purposes. They aid in the teasing, taunting aspect of the bouncing runner. They illustrate the runner's impatience with the situation, with the pitcher, and with himself. They serve to remind the reader of the cries of the spectators as they chant one phrase again and again. They also portray the nervousness of the baseman as he strives to stay with the runner and also be prepared for the play.

The plosive verb forms of lines 1 and 3, "poised," "pulled," and "pointing," begin the build-up of suppressed action and tension. The alliteration continues in line 6, "scattering of steps sidewise." The plosives finally build up with the repetition of the "t" verbs in lines 7 and 8 and the energy and explosiveness of the situation is nearly unbearable: "How he teeters, skitters, tingles, teases, / Taunts them, hovers...."

The ten-line poem employs four similes to aid in its imagery. In line 2, "like a tightrope-walker" gives the reader a new visual cue with which to view the base runner. Lines 4 and 5 contain two similes: both are used to describe the "bouncing tiptoe" action of the athlete: "like a dropped ball," which seems to bounce effortlessly in an action that comes from nowhere, and like "a kid skipping rope," which is an activity with seemingly no end. The final simile is in line 8, where Francis describes the runner hovering "like an ecstatic bird." The word "ecstatic" seems to overflow with excitement. An excited bird is uncontrollable, frenzied, and wild; for example, a mother bird's actions when her nest is being threatened.
Line 9 is a calm before the storm. The vowel sounds slow the action a bit and cause some doubt as to whether the attempt to steal will be made. In line 10, the repetition of the word "delicate" is extremely effective. Most people would expect three repeats of the word, but Francis uses four with great effect. The fourth repetition extends the expectancy to the point where it cannot return. The runner is gone. This amazing last line expresses particularly well all the poised action and bursts of energy that are so much a part of baseball and its appeal.
Football

Football has become one of the major American social rituals. Its enthusiasts claim that football has replaced baseball as America's national pastime. Chapin (1976:2) states, "...Football is a human attempt to impose order upon chaos...," a task also performed by poets. It is in football that the stereotype of the "dumb jock" most haunts the game and the players. It is no wonder then that talented poets, especially those who have played football themselves, have written about the game. They are insulted, as well they should be, with the idea that football poetry means the Kansas Jayhawk Yell or halftime pieties or vulgarities. The predominance of televised football and the slow-motion replay have emphasized the fact that football is graceful and flowing and beautiful as well as violent and brutal and painful. There are poems to illustrate both aspects in this section.

The violence of football has found eloquent outbursts in many poems. Two of the best examples of short descriptions about football's brutality are by James Wright and Don Welch respectively. The poem, "Autumn Begins in Martin's Ferry, Ohio," concludes with the following image:

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

The final line leaves one shocked with one's own image of high school players banging away at each other. In "The Return" a player
is injured and left paralyzed. Welch jolts the reader when he describes the injury:

snapping his neck until
a pearl-gray odor dribbled out of him
and was caught by a doctor
and breathed back into his head,
but only his head.

Lillian Morrison writes of football's patterned beauty in her poem, "In the beginning was the." Some of her phrases that aptly describe this aspect are "spiralling true," "neatly hugged/ by a swivel-hipped back," and "always the beautiful/ trajectories." These descriptions help explain a major portion of football's appeal.

Don Welch is a poet who successfully combines his writing and his interest in sports. He has compared a specific type of poem, the sonnet, to the rules of football and has found similarities. A sonnet consists of fourteen lines with three four-line stanzas completed by a two-line stanza. Each quatrain must be able to support the following four lines of the sonnet. A football team has four downs with which to proceed ten yards, or it must turn over the ball to the other team. These four-down series support each other so that the team may move down the field. The doublet at the conclusion is similar to the two parts of the completion of a scoring drive: the touchdown and the kicked extra point. Or, if one wishes, the doublet is similar to the two-point conversion following a touchdown. The ritual or closed forms of football and poetry, then, are similar.
Welch also feels that if a man doesn't write he must compete in some other way in order to find out who he is. The following two poems are by authors who have done both, and their poetry reveals their experiences.
In the Pocket

Going backward
All of me and some
Of my friends are forming a shell my arm is looking
Everywhere and some are breaking
In breaking down
And out breaking
Across, and one is going deep deeper
Than my arm. Where is Number One hooking
Into the violent green alive
With linebackers? I cannot find him he cannot beat
His man I fall back more
Into the pocket it is raging and breaking
Number Two has disappeared into the chalk
Of the sideline Number Three is cutting with half
A step of grace my friends are crumbling
Around me the wrong color
Is looming hands are coming
Up and over between
My arm and Number Three: throw it hit him in
the middle
Of his enemies hit move scramble
Before death and the ground
Come up LEAP STAND KILL DIE STRIKE
Now.

James Dickey
James Dickey was a college football player. He has become a powerful poet, and his experience lives and breathes through his work. The poem "In the Pocket" is a description of one play from scrimmage. The reader is allowed inside the quarterback's head as he backs into the pocket and looks for a receiver.

Because the lines are centered on the page, the poem appears to represent the confined space of the pocket formed by the blockers. The two very short lines--20 and 24--receive extra emphasis. Line 20 is the only line that does not begin with a capital letter. The single word "now" in line 24 is effective even at a quick glance. It is reminiscent of the quarterback's solitary position even in the midst of "friends." "Now" also adds to the sense of urgency the quarterback feels.

The enlarged spaces in lines 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 22, and 23, indicate hesitations in the action, and pauses in the quarterback's thoughts, or are used for clarity in place of punctuation.

The capitalized verbs in line 23 jump out and claim the reader's attention. They also slow down the reader so that their sounds are emphasized. Their physicality makes them say in sound their actual meanings. These words summarize the violence and brutality of the sport. The way Dickey has enlarged them and battered them at the reader one after another increases their harshness. The words also contrast magnificently with the quiet impact of the final word "now." Other words that give power to the brutal imagery are
"violent" in line 9, "raging and breaking" in line 12, "crumbling" in line 15, "enemies" in line 21, and "death" in line 22.

"Going backward," line 1, gives the reader the impression that the action is now occurring. In line 2, "all of me" is a reference to the unity of body and mind that is necessary in sports. The quarterback is perhaps the epitome of that unity. The quarterback refers to his teammates as "friends" in lines 3 and 15. This is a direct contrast to "enemies" of line 21.

The pocket is called a "shell" in line 3. This word reminds the reader of its fragility and susceptibility to crushing forces. Dickey credits the "arm" with a sense of vision in line 3. Lines 4-7 give the patterns of the receivers. One is going farther than the quarterback believes he can throw.

The well-trained quarterback then follows the play as he should by looking for his numbered receivers in order. The first one is supposed to break into the area that is swarming, "alive" with linebackers. He cannot get free. The quarterback has to back up farther (lines 11 and 12) for more time as the pocket is being destroyed around him. His second receiver has been forced out of bounds or has fallen on the sideline. Finally he sees that his third man has a "half step of grace" from the defenders. The word "grace," line 15, is especially effective in the midst of such wild moves and violent descriptions as Dickey has been using. The word is calming. It implies beauty and for some, a divine intervention.
The pocket is completely destroyed by the defense in lines 15-19. "Looming" in line 17 is especially descriptive of the tenacious linemen of "the wrong color" as they appear between the quarterback and his receiver. The quarterback is then on his own, as in lines 19-24, the reader is battered with his incomplete yet commanding thoughts. His mind forces him to "scramble" and throw the ball at the receiver's middle even while both are in the middle of "enemies."

Readers who have never played football can gain a rare insight from this poem. The play is an extremely busy 5-10 seconds. Those who have experience to rely on can look at the poem from the viewpoint of their own positions: the blockers providing protection, the receivers, the defensive secondary, or the charging defensive linemen. All of these players, too, can learn by reading the thoughts of the quarterback as Dickey has presented them. Other quarterbacks can find sympathy in the poem as they see mirrored there many of their own actions and thoughts. The poem is only one play, but it can last a lifetime.
The Touchdown in Slow Motion

1 The way to turn thirty
2 Is to kill off the light
3 And begin over
4 In slow motion:

5 So here I go
6 in the shape
7 of my father's hope
8 on a 30 sweep right
9 ranging out cutting
10 now turning it on
11 turning the corner
12 to give up turf and
13 snatch what I
14 need to be nifty
15 with a last fake
16 in a farewell wave of my hand

17 stretching out
18 I find my light
19 and a way to move
20 in the green world

David Allan Evans
David Allan Evans has experienced the impulses of a halfback on a sweep play. He has a recollection in his mind and muscles of such events. Until he began to write and appreciate language, all he had were his impulses and recollections, and they were vague because of his inarticulateness. Now he has added definition to his emotional responses. He learned that his athletic experiences could mean even more once he could define them in language, especially the language of poetry. It is for this reason that a second poem he has written is included in this chapter. It would be difficult to find a finer example of a poet-athlete who appreciates his dual identities and fuses them into one being through his creativity. Other athletes have come to better appreciate their sports through his expressions.

The title of the poem, "The Touchdown in Slow Motion," immediately brings to mind the fluid and graceful action evident on the television screen during slow motion replays. The poem is a replay in the mind of the player of his glorious moment. All athletes like to relive the times when things went right, when they lived up to the expectations placed upon them. Even a reader who has not experienced a sweep right feels himself making the cuts and fakes with the runner. The poem has this definite advantage over the televised replay. It is difficult to replace the professional hero with one's own imperfect body. But the poem assists the reader's identification. He is the runner. His body responds as his mind projects him into the image.
The poem's only punctuation is the colon at the conclusion of the first stanza that says, "Here's the play, here it comes."
The first four lines are distinctive because every line is capitalized and begins at the left margin. The first line could have varying interpretations. Perhaps the athlete is about to have his thirtieth birthday and he needs to recollect what it feels like to be youthful. Perhaps it is a reference to the play number as stated in line 8, the player's jersey number, or all of these. The darkness adds to the feeling of aloneness and also the impression of an actual, visual replay. Because of the reference to the light and "stretching" in line 17, it may seem to some that the athlete is in his bedroom. Others who are familiar with the experience realize that the "lights out" are so the game film can be replayed.

The long vowels in line 4 slow down the action. The slow down is continued in lines 5-7. A sweep play begins rather slowly even when not in slow motion.

Beginning in line 9 is the description of the runner's moves. The plosive "t" sounds alliterated in lines 10-12 help illustrate the explosive turn of speed as the runner turns the corner and cuts upfield: "...cutting/ now turning it on/ turning the corner/ to give up turf."

Lines 13-14 contain words that are spoken more quickly and intimate some jabbing moves by the runner: "snatch" and "need to be nifty." The "n" alliteration adds a quick hardness. "Nifty" is a light-hearted term and is uniquely applied to the back's movements.
"Farewell" in line 16 demonstrates that the runner is on his way for a touchdown; he is gone.

The closing quatrain may be the end of the play. The runner has found his path of daylight and so is "stretching out" in his sprint for the goal line. His green world is the turf around him. An alternate interpretation might relate these lines to the first stanza. These final lines are set apart by the poet, so they are to be a separate notion, but they are not set up in an identical manner to the first four lines. It is for each reader to relate to the lines as his age and experience dictates.

The use of the four-line stanzas relates the poem physically to the four downs in football. Perhaps the sweep is a surprise fourth down call.

The poem sets forth another important aspect of sports—that parents often live vicariously through the actions of their children. Lines 5-7 state this quality in a most memorable fashion: "So here I go/ in the shape/ of my father's hope." Many times unnecessary pressure is placed on youthful athletes by well-meaning parents who desire to see their children accomplish what they just never seemed to be able to do, or who expect the youngster to be "as good as ol' Dad was" even though Dad has improved through twenty years of memory and reliving his "touchdown in slow motion."
Basketball

Sport is ordinarily a youthful activity. Many writers explore the question of what happens when a young sports hero outgrows the acclaim. Can he make the adjustment to live a mature and useful adult life, or does he become a misfit? It seems that the heroes of team sports, such as football and basketball, are most susceptible to this questioning. John Updike writes of this theme in his poem, "Ex-Basketball Player." It is about a fellow who still holds the county record for most points in a season, but

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,  
Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,  
As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,  
But most of us remember anyway.

Flick cannot forget, and the poem ends with him lost in reverie at the local hangout.

The number of basketball poems of quality is growing along with the popularity of the sport. Basketball has become a favorite wintertime activity, especially in the midwest where winters are harsh and tend to keep people close to home. They still manage, however, to support the local team.

A common phrase in basketball circles is "the touch." It refers to the ability of some players to be able to put the ball through the hoop no matter what. In Updike's poem he states, "The ball loved Flick." He was a player who had "the touch." It is this type of player who seems to become hooked on the "satisfying swoosh" of the ball filling the net. Two players who share the fascination
may have no need for words. The ball and net speak for them, as Dennis Trudell elucidates in "The Jump Shooter." Even though the shooter was too old, slow, and fat to play for a team, he still had "the old touch."

It's difficult for a player to know when he should give up the sport he has come to love. Many find it impossible to retire as long as they still have the satisfaction of making the shots. David Hilton explores this difficulty in "I Try to Turn in My Jock."
I Try to Turn in My Jock

The way I see it, is that when I step out on that court and feel inside that I can't make the plays, it'll be time to call it quits. --Elgin Baylor

Going up for the jump shot,
Giving the kid the head-fakes and all
'Till he's jocked right out the door of the gym
And I'm free at the top with the ball and my touch,
Lifting the arc off my fingertips,
I feel my left calf turn to stone
And my ankle warp inward to form when I land
A neat right angle with my leg,
And I'm on the floor
A pile of sweat and sick muscles,
Saying,
Hilton,
You're 29, getting fat.
Can't drive to your right anymore,
You can think of better things to do
On Saturday afternoons than be a chump
For a bunch of sophomore third-stringers;
Join the Y, steam and martinis and muscletone.
But, shit,
The shot goes in.

David Hilton
"I Try to Turn in My Jock" is a poem of personal experience, written in first person. In a portion of the poem the author is talking to himself and even calls himself by name (line 12). The title and the introductory quote from basketball professional Elgin Baylor set the scene. The reader expects the athlete to no longer be able to "make the plays" and to give up basketball.

The first five lines are used to describe Hilton's scoring attempt. He is working against a younger player and his head fakes and body moves are very effective. "Going" and "giving" introducing lines 1 and 2 assist the feeling of action and total commitment. He's putting everything into it. Line three is a unique combination of two cliches that are frequently heard around men's basketball: "Faked right out of the gym" and "faked right out of his jock."

The youngster fell for his fakes and is no longer a factor of the play. Hilton is then "free at the top" (line 4). Going up for the shot he is on top of the world and everything is going his way. All that is important now in this isolated moment of time is the ball and his fingertips which control the "touch." Line 5 employs an important coaching term, "arc." Younger players especially have to be constantly reminded that arched shots will have a better chance of hitting the target.

During lines 6-10 Hilton comes back to earth and is forced to face reality. His left calf becomes cramped (line 6). The phrase "turn to stone" has a rhyming, rhythmical sound quality about it that more than describes the cramp--it makes one share the pain.
In line 7, he refers to his ankle as warping inward or twisting out of shape. Visually it is difficult for a reader to see "ankle warp" and not think of ankle wrap. The image of his ankle forming a right angle with his leg is extremely effective. The pain of landing on that turned ankle is real. He melts to the floor (lines 9-10) in "a pile of sweat and sick muscles." The "s" alliteration symbolizes the man's own mind hissing at him in his humiliation. He is forced to re-evaluate himself. The two short, one-word lines (11 and 12) emphasize the beginning of his self admonishment as he is piled on the floor. He condemns himself thoroughly. He's old and he's overweight (line 13). He can't move well to his right anymore (line 14). Then he leaves the physical aspects and points out the intellectual inadequacy. He should be able to find a better way to spend his Saturday afternoons than by making a fool of himself in front of "kids." "Chump" sounds especially degrading. The ultimate abasement is that his opponents are not even good; they're "sophomore third-stringers" (line 17). In line 18 he tempts himself with emotionally pleasant "m" words--"steam and martinis and muscletone"--that could be his if he just gave up the game.

The memorable closing lines of the poem summarize everything. He can't "turn in his jock" as long as the touch is still there. He is making the plays as long as the shot is good. Basketball has its grip on him and he can't quit--not yet.

Hilton has employed several poetic devices to make the last lines definitive. They are shorter than most of the lines, and so
distinctive as a change of pace. The alliteration of the "sh" sound is overpowering. The near-rhyme of the end words caused by the repetition of the vowel sounds makes the lines hang together. Finally, the ending is so casual that it contrasts with the severity of Hilton's previous mental self-lecture. The reader is amused as he visualizes Hilton picking himself up and limping down the court to continue the game. He has accomplished what he was meant to do--put the ball through the hoop.
Swimming

Although there are many sports poems available covering many different sports and events, this final selection is a poem about swimming. Women were allowed to participate competitively in swimming and diving before any other sport. The sport was considered suitable to their beauty and adroitness. Swimming emphasizes many aspects that are important to poetry as well, such concepts as beauty, fluidity, grace, thrift, and cadence.

Water can symbolize man's ultimate enemy--death. Therefore, the swimmer is idolized as the hero who bravely enters death's embrace. Robert Francis in his poem "Swimmer" describes the swimmer's movements as he "negotiates his way." To dramatize the swimmer's position he states, "Danger he leans on, rests in. The drowning sea/ Is all he has between himself and drowning." Another common symbol is that of the swimmer as a lover relaxing in supporting and reaching arms which stroke and caress him.

Competitive swimming is rhythmic and energetic. It is a race against the clock. It requires a great deal of practice, conditioning, and determination to be a successful competitor.
400-meter Freestyle

The GUN full swing the swimmer catapults and cracks
feet away onto that perfect glass he catches at
and throws behind him scoop after scoop cunningly moving
to the water back to move him forward. Thrift is his wonderful
secret; he has schooled out all extravagance. No muscle
plies without compensation wrist cock to heel snap to
his mobile mouth that siphons in the air that nurtures
at half an inch above sea level so to speak.

The astonishing whites of the soles of his feet rise
and salute us on the turns. He flips, converts, and is gone
all in one. We watch him for signs. His arms are steady at
the catch, his cadent feet tick in the stretch, they know
the lesson well. Lungs know, too; he does not list for
he drives along on little sips carefully expended
but that plum red heart pumps hard cries hurt how soon
near one more and makes its final surge

TIME: 4:25:9

MAXINE W. KUMIN
Kumin's "400-meter Freestyle" is not a poem of great depth (no pun intended), but it does portray the truth and pleasure of sports competition. This poem has one very apparent quality--its physical appearance on the page. Just by glancing at the poem, the reader is forced into an awareness of the swimmer making his laps in the pool. The letters that connect the lines at alternating ends are positioned to be reminiscent of the swimmer's turn and push-off of the wall. The physical appearance is one of the poem's outstanding attributes. The visual pattern emphasizes the uniformity and symmetry of the event. The title of the poem includes not only the style of the swimmer but that of the poem as well.

The poem begins with capital letters to signify the shot that starts the race. The poet has employed punctuation to signify changes of emphasis; the marks are not employed according to rules of grammar.

The verbs "catapults" and "cracks" are effective in line 1. Kumin uses alliteration effectively in that first line. It is also used to aid the descriptions in lines 7, 8, and 13. Line 13, the "l" sounds aid the vision of liquid fluidity. The "h" sounds alliterated in line 15 symbolize the swimmer's labored breathing.

Some effective phrases are used by Kumin to describe the swimmer's movement. "Moving the/ water back to move him forward" in lines 3-4 is a fine picture of the swimmer's efforts. In line 9, "astonishing whites" is definitive. "Salute" of line 10 is effective because it is generally considered a hand gesture, but within the
poem it describes the feet. "Cadent feet tick" of line 12 has a rhythmic sound that multiplies the sense of the words. The swimmer's flutter kick has a cadence, but the clock he is racing beats on relentlessly.

The poem's second most distinctive feature is its final outburst. The words "how soon its/ near one more and makes its final surge" leave the reader suspended for the final and almost violent thrust for victory. The thoughts are not punctuated because the swimmer makes no pauses. The rhythm continues into that final surge of strength. The capital letters of "time" pattern those that begin the poem.

The lines of the poem are rhythmical, as are the swimmer's actions. The letters that connect the lines force a slight hesitation, just as the conversion or turn-around of the swimmer is a hesitation of his stroking rhythm.

Overall, the poem is an accurate portrayal of the joy of effort for the swimmer and the pleasure of "watching for signs" by the tense spectator or coach.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this study, sport and poetry have been shown to belong together in three ways: (1) both are expression and experience; (2) the terminology of sports and poetry is similar; and (3) the sports poem can successfully communicate the sport event.

Sport and poetry share a sense of the physical. They express the joy of living. They employ creativity. They unite the body and mind. They are rhythmic. They have style and form. They are precise; they are controlled. Both suggest and imply more than they seem to on the surface. Sport and poetry are natural expressions and experiences of human beings.

Nims (1974:xxxii) states that the ancient Greeks considered the poet an "athlete of the word." He says the Greeks would feel that in a modern university, poetry would belong as much to the departments of physical education and athletics as to the English or literature departments. Poetry is physical because words are physical. Morrison (1965:vii) feels that athletes are especially fitted to read poetry as it should be--with muscles as well as eye, ear and mind.

Working together, athletes and poets may learn to fully express a genuine vitality and zest for life. They can encourage others to put aside their individual prejudices. Both sport and
poetry have been misunderstood. The stereotypes of "dumb jock" and "sissy poet" have existed too long. The athletes and poets should learn from one another, inspire one another to excellence, and acknowledge and elevate each other.

Sports-minded persons have an obligation to correct the mistaken idea that the sport experience cannot be communicated. They have a responsibility to improve their verbal skills so that expression of the sport experience can come from those who are involved in that experience. The experience of an author greatly increases the value of his writing. To know sport, one must be involved and attend to the perceptions of one's own body; one must be a student and spectator and participant all in one. Sport expression of the non-athlete must remain by comparison stunted and lacking in inner vision.

The sports-minded person may find that poetry is a natural expression of the sport experience. He may use it to express himself and to increase his understanding. Not all athletes need to be poets, but athletes can increase their knowledge through the wise use of good poetry.

Poets, too have a responsibility. They need to recognize that sports are a permanent and pervasive part of society. Sports are becoming increasingly important to a growing number of people; therefore, sports may be one common denominator that a poet can use to elicit a response from the reader. The poet and the sports-minded person, working as a cooperative unit, or the poet who
sports-minded may discover images and metaphors that help to explain and explore some of life's mysteries.

Experience and response are cyclical. When the total person has a memorable experience or a peak moment, the human desire is to communicate that experience to another. The quality of the response, whether physical or linguistic, is refined until the response brings one as close as possible to the experience. Poetry brings one closest to the physical event, yet retains the mystery and magic of the experience.

Poetry and sports share many terms. Some of the major ones are rhythm, form, flow, style, grace, economy, and harmony. The language of good poetry has implications that apply to sport as well.

Quality sports poetry is already available in a limited amount. These poems successfully communicate and celebrate sport events.

Sport and poetry belong together. If that "belonging-together" can be increased and vitalized, it will be for their mutual benefit and excellence.
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APPENDIX

The following terms may have some value in future comparisons of sport and poetry. They were found in various discussions of sport and poetry and may demonstrate further shared similarities.

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naturalness  spontaneity
obsession     steps
organization strain
peak          strength
reach         substitution
resistance    thrust
sequence      tightness
shape         touch
soaring       tough
space         transition
spare         variation
specificity   virtuosity
speed         worthiness