An Alleged Problem with Soccer
A Critique of Kretchmar’s Argument that Time-Regulated Games Are Flawed

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1. Introduction

One of the most widely discussed questions in recent philosophy of sports literature is what constitutes a 'good game'. What games should (or shouldn’t) we play--and why should (or shouldn’t) we play them? This question is threefold. It considers (i) how good games are structured, (ii) how ethical matters play part in gameplay, and (iii) which parts of which games that have aesthetic value. In this paper I discuss a problem involving all three of these matters, which has been said to affect players of certain games, and of my interest specifically, players of soccer.

When discussing what kind of structure makes a 'good game', what is discussed is how and if the structure of the game in question produces a fair test of the skills that determine the winner. Scott Kretchmar\(^1\) argues that all games can be divided into two structural categories. Games can be event-regulated, such as golf, baseball, or sprinting. Or, they can be time-regulated, such as soccer, ice hockey, or basketball. In an event-regulated game, the players participate in a predetermined number of events, that as a whole constitute the test. Event-regulated games make clear when the game starts, how many and what kind of problems the players have to confront, and what counts as the end of the game. In a time-regulated game, the players undergo testing for a predetermined amount of time, and the whole of the test is the not-specified number of problems that occur in the predetermined timeslot. All games are, according to Kretchmar, one or the other, and not both. Time is a bad way of structuring games, says Kretchmar.

Both time-regulation and event-regulation can be fully functional structures—that is, they succeed in producing games in which participants undergo a "consistent confrontation of their respective tests or problems"\(^2\). But time-regulated games are said only to be fully functional when the ethos of the amateur spirit is in place. This is when players want to experience the "full test". So, if and when this ethos is not in place, the flaws of time-regulated games are exposed, and we can more clearly see the problems they possess. These games, says Kretchmar, only allow for testing\(^3\), and do not require testing to take place.\(^4\) For instance, it seems as if time-regulated games encourage and/or justify slow-down-tactics, which according to Kretchmar is aesthetically bad, and one of the reasons why time-regulated games are bad. If the structure of the game allows for events

\(^3\) "Test" is in this context equal to "Problem", which is explained in Section 2.
that are aesthetically bad, this is a bad thing.

Furthermore, Kretchmar has argued that time-regulated games are flawed because two moral obligations of sportsmanship produce a dilemma for the worse player in a time-regulated game. These obligations are 1) to "try your hardest to win" and 2) to "play the game". In a lopsided game, the most effective way for the worser team to meet the first obligation would be to reduce the number of "skillful interchanges", since the number of these, in a time-regulated game, are not pre-determined (as is the case in, for instance, golf). Each additional skillful interchange is, according to Kretchmar, all things considered to the benefit of the better team, and therefore, it can be seen as satisfying the first guideline to actively reduce the number of such interchanges, since this would increase one’s chances to win. This is directly in conflict with the second obligation, following Kretchmar’s interpretation: to "allow for or promote a full or natural number of skillful interchanges". Actively trying to reduce skillful interchanges cannot be said to satisfy the obligation "to play the game". It is akin to me trying to convince my golf opponent to skip the last few holes of our golf round, and claim a "win" for myself. So, when I am the worse player in a time-regulated game, I either fail to be a worthy opponent, or I do not play the game at all. This what I will refer to as The Dilemma. This cannot happen in event-regulated games, because in such games, each player must undergo the same amount of testing, and the same pre-determined number of skillful interchanges. This is, according to Kretchmar, why time-regulated games are flawed.

In this paper, I will criticize Kretchmar on three accounts. My first objection concerns stalling. Firstly, I will argue that stalling is not always aesthetically bad. If stalling is not always aesthetically bad, this would counter Kretchmar’s intuition that this is one of the big problems with time-regulated games. And secondly, I will argue that the stalling that is in fact aesthetically bad can be dealt with it without abandoning time-regulation altogether. If stalling is not aesthetically bad, or can be effectively dealt with within the structure, this gives us reasons to reject the claim that The Dilemma would be problematic. My second objection is that I believe that athletes do not always have the obligation to try their best to win. I believe that athletes often only have an obligation to try hard, and sometimes, not even that. If this is the case, The Dilemma will cease to exist. My third objection is that I believe that Kretchmar has a faulty interpretation of what a ’skillful interchange’ might be. Kretchmar's idea that the two guidelines are in conflict rely on his understanding of ’skillful interchange. I will argue that Kretchmar under-defines ’skillful interchange”—that is, that his definition is too narrow. It does not include all things that should be regarded as ’skillful interchanges’. If this is the case, it gives us reason to reject the supposed conflict of The Dilemma.
2. Clarifications

Before I go on to show what is wrong with Kretchmar’s argument, I will provide a few clarifications of terms and concepts that are central to the debate. These clarifications will show how the terms are used in the debate, and how I will use them in this essay.

A: Game. Wittgenstein has argued that the elements of a game all fail to define what a game is, and that therefore, such a definition is impossible. I do not think that this is the case. I will not go further into this discussion, and will instead use the term ‘game’ as I believe is the practice in the debate about sports. I will follow Bernard Suits’ definition and use the term ‘game’ in a way such that ‘playing the game’ means ‘to voluntarily attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.’ In The Grasshopper, Suits offers a fuller definition:

[T]o play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity.

Suits contrasts games with work. Although working and playing games are similar in many ways (they are both goal-based activities, for instance), they differ in the fact that in work, we "employ the most efficient available means for reaching a desired goal", while in games, we do not. Take golf as an example. Surely, the most efficient way of putting the golf ball into the hole would be to pick it up and walk up to the hole, proceeding to put it there by hand. The introduction of golf clubs is in a way inefficient—it makes the activity harder, and this is what makes it a game. Poker is a game, where the goal is to have the most money (or markers) after all the rounds have been played. Surely, using a scheme of cards and rules to distribute the money (or markers) is more complicated, and more inefficient, than simply assaulting my opponent and taking the money. These examples

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7 Suits (1978), p. 34.
8 ibid., p. 23.
9 ibid.
might be comical, but they illustrate a point: when we make games, we create artificial obstacles. Swimming competitions are games, where the goal is to swim in a certain way from point A to point B. It would surely be easier to swim in the most efficient way (crawl) and it would surely be even easier\textsuperscript{10} to bring a boat or submarine into the task. It would also, in many cases, be easier to get out of the water and walk. But most importantly, swimming competitions, poker rounds, golf and soccer are all games because we don’t have to do them. We do them for fun.

It should be noted that it is unclear whether all sports are games by this definition. For instance, is track-running a game? The most efficient way of moving between point A and B would surely be to run as fast as possible in a straight line.\textsuperscript{11} For the purpose of this essay, I will assume that most of them are—that will surely be enough for my argument to be sound.\textsuperscript{12}

The last part of the quote above, where we accept the rules because they make the activity possible, is what Suits calls the "lusory attitude". This attitude is necessary for a game to take place, because it involves the players accepting these unnecessary rules. If I get invited to play golf with some friends, and when handed the golf club I exclaim ”This is ridiculous! I won’t use that—I’ll simply put the golf ball in the hole by hand”, this is a textbook example of me not having the lusory attitude.

\textit{B: Game Structures and Problems.} I will accept Kretchmar’s division of all games into two categories, even if he has since revised this statement.\textsuperscript{13} His addition of a third kind of games (achievement-based games) will make no difference for the purpose of this essay. I will also accept Kretchmar’s definitions of the two categories; time-regulated and event-regulated games. An event-regulated game will then be a game that stipulates a predetermined amount of events (or problems)

\textsuperscript{10} It could be argued that it would not be easier all things considered. It could be fairly difficult to get your hands on a submarine. The idea here is that it is more efficient to drive a submarine than swimming, when the goal is to traverse a body of water.

\textsuperscript{11} I believe that Suits would respond something like this: ”Yes, but mind you that it would be easier if you were allowed to shove your opponents with your hands. It would be easier to be the fastest to move between point A and B if you could incapacitate your opponents. Mind also that in a longer track run, say, 5000 meters, it is often the case that it is ran on an actual track. In this case, it would be much easier to just run across the field and across the finish line. Hence, the goal is not only to run from A to B as fast as possible but to run \textit{along} the entire course as fast as possible. Note also that that it might seem unnecessary to run, since it is tiresome. My point is that facts about the activity itself are accepted \textit{because they make the activity possible}.”

\textsuperscript{12} If not, it’s enough that we accept that soccer is a game, since most of my claims will be about soccer.

that make up the entirety of the game. There is a predetermined number of problems that has to be negotiated by the players, and when the last problem has been negotiated, that is the end of the game. I will here explain what is meant by ”problem”. A golf game, for instance, typically consists of 18 holes. Each hole is a separate problem that has to be negotiated. It is mostly the case that after each problem, one of the players comes out with an advantage. A tennis game typically consists of a given number of sets. Each set is then a separate problem. The problem of golf could be phrased as a question, namely: ”who can get the ball in the hole in the least amount of swings?” A 100-meter sprint only consists of one problem, the problem ”who can cross this line first?”. This is what is meant by a problem. What I want to get across is this point: what the problem is is different in every type of game. The problem(s) is what the game consists of, and playing the game is, so to speak, to attempt to solve the game problem (the problem posited by the game in question).

A time-regulated game is then a game that uses a predetermined amount of time to determine the start and the end of the game. During this time slot, any number of problems can be negotiated. The problems are not just any part of the game. The problem is what we use to find out who wins. In a soccer game, for instance, the goal is to get the ball into the net of the opposing team while avoiding that they get the ball into your net. Here, goals are—in some way—problems. Any number of goals can (theoretically) occur during a soccer game. That is, the number is not predetermined. It is instead the time of the game that is predetermined. It makes no difference that the amount of time used is in many cases plastic. For instance, time is often added at the end of time-regulated games, to make up for what we might call lost time. This will be of great importance to this discussion, but note that it does not alter the structure—time still determines the end of the game.

C: Aesthetically Good. Kretchmar does not provide the reader with any clarifications about what makes activities aesthetically good or bad. When discussing what makes an activity ’aesthetically good’ (or ’aesthetically bad’) I therefore think it will be helpful to follow Emily Ryall14, and say that what makes an activity ’aesthetically good’ is that it is a full (or almost full) test of the skills inherent to the game itself. What makes an activity ’aesthetically bad’ is then that it is not a full (or almost full) test of the skills inherent to the game itself. Ryall has used this definition to argue that penalty shoot-outs should be replaced by alternative means in soccer, since they fail to satisfy this definition of being aesthetically good.

D: Soccer and Football. As the term 'football' can be used to refer to different kinds of activities, I will use the term 'soccer' exclusively. This is solely to avoid confusion. It should be noted that at any time the term 'football' occurs in this essay (i.e. in quotes) it refers to soccer, and not any other kind of football, say, American football.

3. Kretchmar’s Argument

Kretchmar thinks that a big problem for time-regulated games is that they only allow for testing and do not require it.\(^\text{15}\) He illustrates this with a thought experiment, where he invites us to imagine what would happen if golf were to become a time-regulated game. Golf no longer consists of 18 (or any predetermined number) holes, but instead consists of ”as many holes as can be completed in [...] 4 hours.”\(^\text{16}\) He says that there would be no way to tell how many holes such a golf game would consist of. He gives the following example.

>P]icture a high-handicap golfer playing by himself who starts out, remarkably enough, with five straight pars. He is so delighted to be even par that far into the game that he then goes into a very slow walk on his way to the sixth tee. If he walks slowly enough, he might actually get time to expire before he has to tee it up again. When asked later by his spouse how his game went, he could quite honestly say that the shot par.\(^\text{17}\)

This is an illustration of how stalling would look in this version of golf. The very slow walk that the golfer does would, according to Kretchmar, be allowed in this type of golf (”in the absence of the amateur ethos and without antistalling rules in place”).\(^\text{18}\) He tries to appeal to our intuitions about this case, and our intuitions surely would say that this is not acceptable. He gives a second example of a similar case.

>[I]f two golfers were in a contest and one of them was 2 up after 12 holes at the 3-hour, 15-

\(^{15}\) Kretchmar (2005), p. 39.

\(^{16}\) ibid.

\(^{17}\) ibid., p. 40.

\(^{18}\) ibid., p. 39.
minute mark of the 4-hour game, this individual could intentionally hit a ball into the deep rough, look for it for the next 45 minutes, and then express his deepest regrets that time had expired before his opponent’s turn.\textsuperscript{19}

He states that these examples, although extreme, exemplify the structural flaw of time-regulated games.\textsuperscript{20} This is a problem, he says, because "we built the game to be played for, say, 40 minutes—not to be played for 25 [...] with the remainder spent in relatively nonskillful inactivity"\textsuperscript{21}. The term "nonskillful inactivity" is of importance here—it is central to Kretchmar’s point that stalling is to be regarded as "nonskillful inactivity".

But this is only the first of two problems of time-regulated games. The second, he says, is that in time-regulated games, "stalling can be justified by the moral guideline of always trying one’s hardest to win"\textsuperscript{22}. Here he introduces the term skillful interchanges. It is worth pointing out that he does not define this term further. This will be of importance later. This is a central point of Kretchmar’s:

In lopsided contests, it is clearly in the best interest of the weaker team to reduce the number of [skillful interchanges] that occur during the game. With each additional interchange, the odds of winning go down.\textsuperscript{23}

For instance, if "the chances for success [...] are 60-40 for the superior player"\textsuperscript{24}, the odds for the worse player steadily decrease with each skillful interchange. The best thing to do for the weaker

\textsuperscript{19} Kretchmar (2005), p. 40.

\textsuperscript{20} A point that I have not seen raised against Kretchmar is the fact that it is not sure whether 'time-regulated golf' would look like this. Event-regulated games are played under a principle like "I-go-you-go" where players take turns in trying to solve the problem. Time-regulated games are not played in such a manner. It is therefore weird to modify golf by only imposing a time limit. I believe, that if golf were to become a time-regulated game, its aim would surely be something like "put as many balls in as possible in [x] minutes"—but it would be a free for all game—it is unreasonable to expect players to take turns under a time-limit (unless you divide the time available absolutely evenly). One might fear that this would put players at risk of getting hit by other players’ golf balls, but then, one could simply do as in rallysport, and have players attempting one full course after each other—player A plays as many holes as possible in 30 minutes, then player B plays as many holes as possible in 30 minutes, etc.

\textsuperscript{21} Kretchmar (2005), p. 41, my italics.

\textsuperscript{22} ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} ibid.
team, if they want to try their hardest to win, would then be to try to reduce the number of skillful interchanges to 1 (one). If the odds are 60-40 for each skillful interchange, a total number of 1 skillful interchanges would produce a 40% chance of winning, and the weaker team would also "have fully honored [their] moral commitment to try [their] hardest to win"25.

Kretchmar seems to think that this 1) is inherently a bad thing, and 2) produces a conflict when combined with another moral obligation for game participants, namely the "equally universal commandment to 'play the game""26. He provides an interpretation of 'play the game', namely "to allow for or promote a full or natural number of [skillful interchanges]"27. It is clearly the case that in the aforementioned example, where the worse team actively reduces the number of skillful interchanges to one, they fail to meet this moral obligation. That is, they fail to play the game. In Kretchmar’s own words, "to play the game under these [...] circumstances [is to] fail to be a 'worthy opponent.' Alternatively, to honor one’s moral obligation to do one’s best [...] is not to play the game at all!"28 This is what I will call The Dilemma.

So, in time-regulated games, we can, as it were, choose whether to play the game or not (while actually playing the game, as weird as it might seem). In baseball (or any other event-regulated game), for instance, the teams cannot make such a choice. "Athletes in baseball games play the full game and [...] try their hardest to outdo their opponents until the last out is made"29. Nothing else is possible.

4. On the Badness of Stalling

In this section, I will provide the first of three arguments against Kretchmar's position. The first argument concerns the badness of stalling. Kretchmar is vividly opposed to all types of stalling. In this section, I will discuss stalling and argue that it is not always aesthetically bad, and that the type of stalling that is bad can be done away with within the time-regulated structure. What does Kretchmar mean when he says that stalling is "aesthetically bad"? He means something along the

26 ibid.
27 ibid., my italics.
28 ibid.
29 ibid.
lines that it is not pleasing to watch. It has been said that "sport in general and football in particular are neighboring phenomena of the arts"\(^{30}\). We often hear talk about beautiful or ugly play, both in soccer and in sports in general. So, what are then these ugly things that take place in soccer?

Kretchmar regularly refers to the type of stalling that basically involves preventing the opposing team to score as opposed to trying to score. He says:

> Near the end of these games an unhealthy stew is often cooked up, one that leaves a bad taste /.../ [the leading team] wants the game to move forward, as it were, while nothing that is game relevant happens.\(^{31}\)

Here he describes an event that we have seen many times: the final minutes of a soccer game, and the behavior of the losing team. If the score is say 2-1, in most cases the losing team will spend the remaining time trying to score, making the score 2-2. The winning team on the other hand, will spend the remaining time not trying to score. They pass the ball safely back and forth between each other, doing what is often referred to as "taking the air out of the ball", or, in everyday language, "killing time". This is, in essence, a textbook example of the type of stalling that Kretchmar argues is aesthetically bad. In his argument, he makes this point very clear.

> [N]othing that is game relevant happens... /.../ using only minimal skill /.../ they run one boring play up the middle after another[.]\(^{32}\)

Kretchmar seems to oppose this type of activity solely on the basis that it is "boring" to watch. As I see it, he takes this attitude of his as evidence of one of two things. Either, he takes this as evidence that these activities are in general regarded as "boring" and therefore aesthetically bad. Or, he takes this as evidence that the only reasonable attitude towards such activities is to regard them as "boring", and that they are therefore aesthetically bad. Regardless of which one he intends, I believe that he is wrong.

Of course, many "casual" fans would tend to agree with Kretchmar here. Those are the people like most of us, that occasionally (and perhaps often) watch soccer at home on TV. They are


\(^{31}\) Kretchmar (2005), p. 42.

\(^{32}\) ibid.
the type of fans, or watchers, that want to be entertained. They seem to, as does Kretchmar, crave an action-filled game where action is reduced to goal attempt after goal attempt. I will not speculate further regarding what actual people think—but what I will say is this: imagine a devoted soccer fan sitting at home watching his preferred team—London FC—playing a game. The score is 2–2 with 10 minutes remaining, and London FC has played well throughout the game. The players are tired, and they spend much of the last 10 minutes passing the ball back and forth in-between players, not attempting to score, but instead preventing the other team to score. When the game ends with a score of 2-2, our soccer fan says to his friend: "We really did a great job in the endgame!". This is not unreasonable. I am sure that most of us would regard this as a perfectly acceptable thing to say in such a situation. I would say that this is evidence for two things. One: stalling is not always regarded as boring. Two: there are other reasonable attitudes toward stalling than regarding it as boring.

Many soccer fans would not regard the type of stalling that Kretchmar describes as aesthetically bad. They would, on the contrary, refer to it as an honorable and skillful way of making the best of the situation at hand. A recurring theme in Kretchmar’s argument is that it seems that his idea of soccer, and of sports in general, is as much action as possible in the shortest amount of time possible, where action is reduced to the most common aspect associated with the game. Stalling is not the opposite of action—on the contrary, it is a perfectly fine example of action. It is also a perfectly honorable and skillful act to try to prevent the opposing team from scoring. The goal of soccer, I would argue, is as much to prevent the opposing team from scoring as to score yourself. In the aforementioned 2-1 game, it is a perfectly honorable and skillful act of the winning team to stall in these ways. For instance, it might be deemed "too risky" for them to try to score. Trying to score could vastly increase the risk of the other team taking control over play, and also increase the risk of the other team scoring. I think it is wrong of Kretchmar to describe this type of activity as "aesthetically bad" just because he thinks it is boring to watch. Soccer is a tactical game in many aspects, and it is one of many tactics at one’s disposal to try to prevent the opposing team to score—which is exactly what this type of stalling consists in. Furthermore, the type of stalling Kretchmar describes requires a large amount of skill. I would actually argue that it falls under the umbrella of "skillful interchanges"—more on that in section 6.

There is, however, another type of stalling that takes place in soccer. This makes use of the fact that soccer is played with a running clock—time is not stopped during gameplay (except in half-time), and after 90 minutes have passed, extra time is added to, so to say, make up for lost time. Players often take advantage of this, since it is often the case that the time added at the end
does not fully make up for time lost. Players then get in arguments with the referee, walk very slowly to pick up the ball for a throw in, spend long stretches of time lying on the ground after an injury (real or fake). This is often regarded as stalling since it is deliberately done to waste time. It is also easier to accept that this type of stalling could be “aesthetically bad”. This, however, can be fixed within the framework of time-regulated games: many other time-regulated games are not played with a running clock. In ice hockey, for instance, time is regularly stopped—usually in situations that are not regarded as gameplay. Trainers can ask for ”time-out”, in which case the clock is paused. The clock is also paused in situations similar to the ones mentioned from soccer—when an injury takes place, when the equivalent of a throw-in takes place, etc. Soccer could be modified in this way, getting rid of this type of stalling while still existing in the time-regulated framework.

5. On Trying Your Hardest

Kretchmar says that athletes have two moral obligations. It is the supposed conflict between these two obligations that generate The Dilemma. Sometimes Kretchmar refers to them as moral guidelines. It should be stressed that he holds them as demanding obligations, since arguably, the conflict between trying your hardest to win and playing the game should be problematic. This conflict cannot exist if it is not the fact that one must do both (which, according to Kretchmar, is sometimes impossible). If they were merely guidelines, it would not be necessary to do them both, and The Dilemma would collapse. Let us bear this in mind.

The first of the two moral obligations is that athletes should try their hardest to win. What then does it mean to “try one’s hardest”? Jeffrey Fry has argued that this concept is problematic because it is ambiguous. He distinguishes between two alternatives. Does it mean to try your hardest ”in the absolute sense” and try to produce a personal best every single time you play? This seems awfully demanding. As Fry says, human physiology prevents athletes from performing ”at their maximum level in an absolute sense on demand at just any given time”. I believe that it is reasonable to follow Fry here and rule out this interpretation of the concept. Does it then mean

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33 Kretchmar 2005, p. 41
35 ibid., p. 3.
merely to try \textit{hard}? It seems to me this is the case. But then we are posed with the question—how hard is hard enough? Is 99\% enough? What about 75\%? And most importantly, how is this determined? Also, are we justified in demanding athletes to try their absolute hardest in lopsided contests? Surely, it would be absurd to hold it as a \textit{moral aim} for Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps to try his absolute hardest against a junior swimmer. I am sure that this would be frowned upon, and it is hard to see how sport could demand such a thing. I would argue that Kretchmar’s first aim should be modified from ”try one’s hardest to win” to ”try hard to win in even competitions”. But this modified aim still doesn’t work.

Kretchmar’s conception of what it means for a soccer player to try his or her hardest (or even hard), seems to suggest that the player should unrelentingly try to score goal upon goal, and not adjust this strategy in the face of opposition. This is a very simplified understanding of soccer in particular and of sport in general, as I am sure that even laymen would agree. Also, this type of gameplay would surely be regarded as highly aesthetically displeasing, making it bad in another way that Kretchmar is already worried about. For sure, the supposed beauty of a game like soccer must be a product of its inherent variation and unpredictability. And as surely, just because an athlete or a team is not trying their hardest \textit{to score a goal} does not mean that they’re not trying their hardest \textit{to win}. Reverting back to the aforementioned stalling tactics, playing safe and playing tactical can all surely be regarded as to \textit{try hard}. Stalling tactics are therefore allowed by the modified moral aim of trying hard to win in even competitions. I would also suggest that we do not always hold athletes to this moral duty. We surely do not expect injured athletes to produce their best effort, or a good effort at all. The same could be said for a team that has, for instance, suffered a bout of hard losses earlier in the series, or a team where all players have slept really bad the night before. We do not think that athletes have a moral duty to try their hardest—we simply think that they have to try hard. Kretchmar has misunderstood what it means to try hard, and further, we do not even always think that athletes have to try hard at all. The duty to to try hard in even competitions is not in conflict with the duty to play the game. I would actually say that they are quite alike. If we accept this revised version of the first moral aim, the athlete does not face a dilemma when playing soccer, or another time-regulated sport.

It has been argued that on the Olympic stage, athletes do in fact have a moral duty to try their hardest to win, since the Olympics ”represent the highest level of the sport”\footnote{Pam R. Sailors, Sarah Teetzel & Charlene Weaving (2015). \textit{’Lentius, Inferius, Debilius: the ethics of ’not trying’ on the Olympic Stage’}. Sport in Society, 18:1, p. 27}. But even if we accept this, this does not show that soccer itself is problematic, or that it is something problematic
with the time-regulated structure—it could just as much be the case that the Olympic format is flawed, since it holds athletes to an impossibly high standard and that soccer should not be an Olympic game.

6. On Skills

In this section, I will argue that Kretchmar has a faulty interpretation of what a skillful interchange is. Kretchmar is unclear about the definition of skillful interchanges. As mentioned earlier, he thinks that it can be in the interest of the worse team to reduce the number of skillful interchanges, and that it is a morally bad thing to do so. It is morally bad because it violates an imperative of sportsmanship—playing the game—that Kretchmar interprets as "allow or promote a full or natural number of skillful interchanges". There sure seems to be a lot coming down to skill. What is a skillful interchange? Nowhere in his argument does Kretchmar present an analysis of skill, nor a definition of 'skillful interchange'. This gives rise to the feeling that his idea of a skillful interchange in soccer would be when two opposing players meet in a close encounter that ends with one and only one of those players in possession of the ball. A paradigmatic event, of course, but this is not the only type of event that takes place in a soccer game.

Torres has defined skill as: "...acquired, intentional, and purposeful capacities to negotiate solutions to problematic situations" and I see no reason to doubt this definition. What, then, is the problematic situation of soccer? Ryall has suggested the following.

The problem in [soccer] is how to get the ball into the goal using only one’s feet (or at least not using the arms, hands or other prohibited means such as a stick), whilst remaining in a defined area (the pitch) with only 10 other supporting players, whilst at the same time preventing the opposition from doing likewise.

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38 Ryall is arguing that Kretchmar is wrong in his analysis of skill and it follows from Kretchmar’s own argument that time-regulated games are superior to event-regulated games. I do not want to stress her point—it is not necessary to go as far as Ryall does to succeed in criticizing Kretchmar. Ryall argues that the fact that Kretchmar under-defines skillful interchange undermines his entire analysis. A more moderate position would be to argue that this fact only undermines his posited dilemma for players of time-regulated games. This is the position that I think we should take.

When Kretchmar talks about skillful interchanges, the type of event he implicitly refers to seems to be much simpler than this. It seems to be something along the lines of a penalty kick. Penalty kicks, following Ryall, is not a good test of the skills inherent to soccer. Sure, a penalty kick is a skillful interchange, but only one kind of skillful interchange. Kretchmar’s reasoning does not allow for different kinds of skillful interchanges. Here is a passage from Kretchmar already quoted above.

In lopsided contests, it is clearly in the best interest of the weaker team to reduce the number of [skillful interchanges] that occur during the game.\textsuperscript{40}

With Torres’s definition of skill in mind, and lacking a better alternative from Kretchmar, this proposition is hard to believe. As mentioned earlier, it can be skillful to prevent the opponent from scoring. Passing back and forth within the team, stalling, whatever you will call it, is a skillful activity. It therefore is a skillful interchange when one team goes about stalling and the other team tries to break up the play. Is it in the best interest of the weaker team to just not show up to the game at all? It seems obvious that it can be in their interest to increase the number of skillful interchanges that occur during the game, if such interchanges increase the odds of winning. In a footnote, Kretchmar himself states that he does ”not want to argue that stalling techniques requires no skill whatsoever”\textsuperscript{41}. He does however still seem to think that they include significantly less skill, as he says: ”With each additional interchange, the odds of winning go down.”\textsuperscript{42}

If Kretchmar is right in this, my rebuttal fails. But he is not right in this—he is wrong. If the odds of winning go down with each additional interchange, each interchange must be of the same kind. It must be the type of proto-soccer that Kretchmar has in mind, that only consists of penalty kicks, free kicks and scrimmage. That is, stalling techniques (e.g.) must require so little skill that we wouldn’t count them when calculating the odds. But there are different kinds of skills, and therefore different kinds of skillful interchanges, and stalling techniques do not require less skill than anything else that is involved in the game. Does it then suffice that Kretchmar says that with each additional interchange, on average, the odds of winning go down? Not really. This is just another way of saying that one of the teams is slightly worse, or less skilled, than the other. But our idea of

\textsuperscript{40} Kretchmar (2005), p. 42.

\textsuperscript{41} ibid., note 14.

\textsuperscript{42} ibid., p. 42.
what it is to be the worse team must allow for worse teams to win games. Otherwise, this is just answers question of which team is worse: "the team that lost the game, of course!" We would not like such an answer, simply because it does not give us any actual information—it just restates the point. If there are different kinds of skills inherent to a game, it is not reasonable to say that the odds of winning go down with each additional interchange. I think that this shows that Kretchmar has a faulty interpretation of what a skillful interchange is.

7. Conclusion

In this essay I have criticized Scott Kretchmar’s proposal that time-regulated games, such as soccer, are flawed. I have argued that Kretchmar is wrong on three accounts. First, I have argued that stalling in soccer can have aesthetic value and is therefore not always aesthetically bad. Furthermore, I have argued that the types of stalling that are in fact aesthetically bad can be made away with without altering the structural framework of soccer. Secondly, I have argued that athletes do not have a moral duty to try their hardest to win. I have argued that they only have a moral duty to try hard, and in some cases, not even that. This challenges The Dilemma, Kretchmar’s idea that there is a conflict between the two moral obligations. Thirdly, I have argued that Kretchmar’s term "skillful interchange" is under-defined and that he is wrong in his analysis of skill. I believe that each of my arguments separately posits a significant challenge for Kretchmar, and that they, taken together, posit a serious challenge for Kretchmar and a good reason for us to refute his conclusion: that time-regulated games are flawed.

Some authors have tried to flip Kretchmar’s analysis on its head and say that it is instead event-regulated games that are flawed, while time-regulated games go unscathed. I haven’t tried to argue this. I have simply tried to argue that Kretchmar have little ground for his claim that time-regulated games are flawed. As I have mentioned, some time-regulated games have certain problems. But as I have argued, these problems can be made away with within the framework of time-regulation, and they do therefore not show that there are problems with time-regulation as such.
References


