

Please note! None of the texts referenced in this paper actually exist. It is completely fictitious.

Bouldering is an Amazing Sport

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Introduction to Philosophy

In this paper I will argue that bouldering is an amazing sport. I briefly discuss what it is to evaluate sports and in so doing provide the definition of sports used in this paper. Next, I lay out the criteria whereby sports can be evaluated, namely ease of access, health benefits and required equipment. I address the criticism raised by Johnson that ease of access is, in terms of one of its three components, not an appropriate evaluative criteria and show that he is mistaken. I conclude by showing that bouldering excels according to all the criteria and is thus an amazing sport.

There are many ways in which sports can be evaluated. James Searle has argued that “the only possible way” of judging sports against one another is to “try them and see” (2000, 99). This utterly subjective approach does little more than present a personal ranking in terms of every individual’s own idiosyncratic tastes and cannot be used to find an objective result. Others have argued that sports are too varied and cannot be meaningfully ranked (Brownlee 2005, 453), yet this holds only if the broadest definition of sports is used. In this paper I understand sports to be “an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment” (Gábor 2020, 3), thus boardgames like chess are excluded. Chess and cards and other such kinds of activities are better understood as games rather than sport, for while they aim to entertain and do require skill, they lack the attribute of physical exertion.

The fairest way in which to rank sports is to evaluate them according to a single set of criteria, thus ensuring an objective and independent position from which to judge them. Szusza Gábor presents the best such set of criteria: ease of access, health benefits and required equipment (2020, 17).

Ease of access refers to the accessibility of the sport regarding three distinct aspects. Firstly, whether it requires a specific terrain or environment, secondly whether the

difficulty of the sport creates a significant barrier to entry and thirdly what range of individuals can enjoy the sport (Gábor 2020, 19–21). Surfing, for example, requires a beach with suitable waves, and is therefore limited when the first aspect is taken into account. All winter sports have the same limitation. Gymnastics, on the other hand, requires so much training and practise before one can achieve even an advanced beginner status that it scores very low on this second aspect. The third aspect is best explained through age groups and physical ability. While people of almost any fitness level or age can enjoy curling or bowling, the physical demands of water polo limits it to the young and strong. Older people who get tired more quickly simply cannot swim properly while holding a ball above water in one hand and fending off physical contact attacks from other players at the same time.

The second criteria – health benefits – relates to “the overall kind of exercise” and “whether it is physically and mentally beneficial” (Gábor 2020, 27). Ski-jumpers need to be strong and require much strength training, which is good for health, though the lack of any endurance training and thus cardio component counts heavily against it. Weightlifting is judged likewise. Football (sometimes termed soccer) is great for cardio, but players tend to get very irate and frustrated on the field, which is bad for mental health. Boxing may help you get fit, but repeated blows to the head are unhealthy.

The third criteria – what kind of equipment is necessary for the sport – is fairly straightforward. Horse polo scores very low in this category as it requires access to a horse, which is notoriously expensive. Scuba diving is also one of the lowest ranking on this criterion. Running, on the other hand, scores very high as it can be done with no equipment other than basic clothing (barefoot is also possible), though it scores low on both the physical and mental health aspects of the third criteria, having been shown to result in immense boredom (Zoltan 2014, 62).

None of Gábor’s three criteria have been subject to much sustained critique. The one exception is Johnson’s argument that ease of access, specifically whether there is a requirement for a specific terrain or environment, is misplaced. Johnson’s view is that “where the sport is enjoyed is not, strictly speaking, part of the sport, but rather a background to it” (1982, 26). My reply to this is that while most environments can be artificially recreated – there are indoor ice rinks even in desert climates – this simply

places a larger burden on the other aspect of the ease of access criterion. People who do not live in a climate suitable for skiing may make use of artificial slopes, though then the cost of entry is raised significantly. It can also be included in the equipment cost category, significantly adding to the equipment needed. While there may be some merit to Johnson's point, it cannot be disputed that without a body of water one simply cannot swim. It may be a definitional concern whether a body of water is included in the understanding of 'swimming', though in order to evaluate sports one must take into account a person's ability to actually take part in the sport.

I am now in a position to show why bouldering is an amazing sport, using the criteria as I have explained them above. Starting from the third criterion, bouldering requires almost no equipment. Bouldering requires no harnesses or ropes, and only a little chalk which is very inexpensive. Any reasonably tight fitting clothing is suitable and while climbing shoes are recommended, a tight pair of running shoes is more than adequate.

The health benefits of bouldering are very good. It requires balance and subtle movements, lending it a grace and elegance, it requires stamina and fitness, thus providing a good cardio workout, and it also requires strength. The awareness of one's own body which bouldering cultivates has been shown to have incomparably good effects on the mind and body (Ross 2019, 123). Bouldering also includes a large amount of problem solving, thus cultivating creative thought. There is little risk of injury when bouldering and unlike pole-vaulting one is never committed to an action. At any moment a climber can stop their move and simply step off the wall or boulder.

Lastly, bouldering is very accessible. Regarding terrain or environment, a suitably large boulder can usually be found, but if not then a brick wall or a rock wall in a city is adequate. Bouldering is easy enough to quickly learn how to enjoy the basic level and only requires immense strength at very high levels of proficiency. People of all shapes and sizes can start and enjoy the sport. With bouldering there is an immense range of ability, by which I mean that one can start as a novice and continue to improve and learn different things for a very long time. Running, in contrast, is not like this: once one has learned to run with good technique there is little else to learn – it then becomes mere fitness.

Bouldering is without a doubt an amazing sport. Few other sports share all the benefits that bounding has to offer. While some sports may score higher than bouldering on one criteria, it is bouldering that consistently scores very high in every category. This does not prove that bouldering is the best, but it certainly makes the convincing case that bouldering is truly amazing.

References

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