

# Too Much to Ask?

*Fresh from a trip to the Rugby World Cup, our columnist shares his holiday wish list*

The holidays are rapidly approaching, and that gives me a moment to look back on the year, while also looking ahead at my hopes for the future. This fall, I spent much of my time in France for the seven-week Rugby World Cup, the third-largest sporting event in the world. Anecdotes from that experience are still on my mind and thus help to illustrate my holiday wish list.

I wish that sportsmanship and respect for your opponent weren't antiquated notions. In that regard, I wish that all youth sports teams throughout the world had seen these traits exhibited at the Rugby World Cup in Lyon, France. There, top-ranked New Zealand played the lowest-ranked team

in the tournament, Portugal. After an overwhelming victory by New Zealand, players from both teams stayed on the pitch to kick a soccer ball around—New Zealand's world famous rugby stars playing pick-up soccer against the Portugal unknowns; it was quite a sight.

I wish that all sports in the world had the ethos of rugby, a sport in which the eventual world champions, South Africa—after eliminating Fiji from the tournament—remained on the field for some 15 minutes while Fiji saluted and then entertained the crowd with a Fijian war chant, so that the two teams could leave the field together.

I wish that government officials in this country weren't held to impossible standards and could act like regular human beings—like the French Cabinet minister, who at a banquet during the World Cup, stated that one of the best things about having her job was her ability to visit the teams in the locker rooms. And she was not shy about expressing her observations and desires while there! If you were to make those very entertaining comments in this country, you would soon be looking for a new job.

I wish that I could see more breakout moments for an up-and-coming athlete in any sport. Such a moment happened in Stade la Mosson in Montpellier when

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by Bob Latham

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an inspired and courageous U.S. team played against the eventual champions, South Africa. U.S. wing Takudzwa Ngwenya left World Player of the Year Bryan Habana in his dust to finish off an amazing try (rugby's equivalent of a touchdown). It was Ngwenya's first international match and he beat Habana, who is generally regarded as the fastest man in rugby, on a try that spanned 95

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meters. The play was later recognized as the "world rugby try of the year."

In a related wish, I wish that more world-class athletes had the graciousness of that same Bryan Habana when he commented, both privately and publicly, on that moment of glory for the U.S.

I wish that more world-class sporting events were staged in towns the size of Montpellier, Toulouse, Bordeaux and Lens, where virtually the whole town attends the events and then spills out into the streets or town center afterwards to create a true sporting festival.

I wish that more hosts had the dexterity of the French Rugby Federation, which hosted a World Cup final that featured three heads of state (France, the U.K. and South Africa) and at least three princes (William and Harry of England, Albert of Monaco), and then, two hours later, staged an end-of-tournament party that opened with a performance by "Monsieur le Sock," a man who performs wearing only ... well ... a sock.

I wish that France would always be as festive and welcoming as it was during the World Cup. And, while we're at it, can they keep that giant rugby ball in the middle of the Eiffel Tower? (It's the only time that anybody can remember the French allowing anything to hang in the middle of the Eiffel Tower).

I wish that there were more times when a country—any country—was totally focused on a sporting event that isn't historically its national sport. In Argentina, the soccer match between Boca and River Plate in October had its starting time adjusted in order for the nation to watch Argentina play for a spot in the Rugby World Cup semifinals.

I wish that disciplinary proceedings that affect an athlete's eligibility would inspire confidence. I represented Paul Emerick, one of the best U.S. players, before a disciplinary board in Paris after he was cited for a dangerous tackle. He fell victim to an inconsistent and selective disciplinary system. So I'm wishing that Paul gets a chance to play

in a full compliment of matches in the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand.

I wish that we had moments of singing the United States' national anthem that could compare with 70,000 Frenchmen singing "La Marseillaise" or 60,000 Englishmen singing "God Save the Queen" in a full stadium. Perhaps it is because "The Star Spangled Banner" is so hard to sing. Or perhaps we dilute its meaning by playing it at every local sporting event rather than saving it for truly national or international events. Whatever the reason, we don't belt it out the way an anthem should be belted out. Instead, we save our group-sing passion for rock anthems like "Stairway to Heaven" rather than our national anthem. I wish that could be reversed.

I wish that volunteerism in sports continues to shine and even inspire volunteering outside of sports. There were more than 6,000 volunteers helping to put on the World Cup in France, and they really made the event possible.

Mostly, I wish I didn't have to wait four more years to enjoy the ultimate gathering of the world rugby family as it reminds me what I love about sports. ■

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